Women in Indian Working Class Movements

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WOMEN IN INDIAN WORKING CLASS MOVEMENTS

Papers submitted in the Seminar held by
Andhra Pradesh Chaitanya Mahila Samakhya (APCMS)
during March 6th to 8th, 1997 at HYDERABAD (INDIA)



Andhra Pradesh Chaitanya Mahila Samakhya
(APCMS)

A Mahila Margam Publication

P. Pavana 52, CIEFL Quarters Tarnaka, Hyderabad.

Period of Publication: January 2004

No. of Publication : 25

No. of Copies: 1000

Price: Rs. 50/-

For Copies: Disha Pusthaka Kendram,

Chikkadpalli, Hyderabad.

Navodaya book house, Kachiguda, Hyderabad.

Telugu book house,

Kachiguda, Hyderabad.

Cover design: Laxmi Digital Graphics, chikkadapalli, Hyderabac

Composing : Sindhu DTP, Kachiguda, Hyderabad

Printers : Akruthi offset printers, Chikkadpalli, Hyderabad

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A Few words from APCMS

The world women proletariat achieved March 8 staking their lives. In the Second International Socialist conference held in Copenhagen in 1910 Clara Jetkin proposed March 8 as the International Women's day. Since then March 8 has been being celebrated worldwide as the International Women's Day. But the cunning ruling classes exploit every symbol and form of people's struggle for their own interests.

Opposing the conspiracies of these imperialists and ruling classes that take away the essence of March 8, declaring that March 8th is the legacy of women workers and explaining its significance, Andhra Pradesh Chaitanya Mahila Samakhya (APCMS) organized an All India-level seminar on March 6,7,8 of 1997 on "Women in Indian Working class Movements" in Hyderabad.

There was a historical context to the seminar. Indian ruling classes declared 1997 as the Golden Jubilee year of Independence, boasting that the country progressed a lot in all fields during these fifty years. They make false claims about the progress in Women's issues and use even March 8 as the forum to spread such lies. But the fifty years of 'Independence' was meant for capitalists and landlords, but not for the oppressed people. The 'Independence' has not only not given them anything, but it further degraded their lives.

Three types of papers were presented in this seminar. The first type of papers describe the liteous conditions of women workers and explain the need of uniting women in the unorganized sector. The survey made on the conditions of female domestic workers in Calcutta, is one such type.

Though the paper on the beedi workers, conditions also belongs to the same type, women are getting organized in that sector. They are joining the struggle both as part of trade unions and other politics.

These papers mainly deal with the economic and sexual exploitation of women. Since women workers are primarily economically exploited and on such exploitation depends the existence if the ruling classes, these papers study in detail how exploitation takes place and expose the exploitation of the 'surplus value'.

The papers on "Women in working, class movement as particularly in Textile mills" and on the "problems of Tendu leaf workers in Dandakaranya" deal with the struggle of women of those sections.

In the second type of papers, the one on the role of women so far in trade unions from colonial rule to the present day (especially in Maharashtra) throws light on some dark corners of history and touches upon the desirable and existing relationship between trade unions and women workers. The paper on "the Impact of new economic policies on women" explains the impact on all sectors and suggests the Tasks of Women's organizations in this context.

The third type of papers deal with the state violence against women in nationality struggles people's revolutionary struggles, and resistance of women.

The representatives from Assam presented a paper about the state violence against Assamese women. It is mainly women there who are falling prey to the state violence perpetrated by the Indian Government as part if suppressing nationality struggles. The incidents mentioned in this paper are the evidence to this fact.

In all the papers on the ongoing struggles, state repression on women is mentioned. They also highlight the need to mobilize protest and resistance to this beastly repression.

The papers explaining the role of women in Telangana, Tebhaga, Srikakulam movement (past and present) and North Telangana Agrarian revolutions belong to one type. These papers record the role of women in the revolutionary struggles that took place and are taking place generally in those regions and those times, not the struggles of one section of women workers. They also recorded the changes brought about by these struggles in the social life and Woman's life too.

In our neighboring Nepal also women workers are facing much the same situation as the Indian women and are fighting. So, though this seminar is mainly held on the women in Indian workers movements, we are also providing you the paper that was submitted in the seminar on the Women in Nepal revolutionary movement, as part of broadening our understanding. The Nepal representatives who has come to the seminar were inspired by the presentations and prepared this paper then and there.

The spring Thunder of Naxalbary is a milestone of great significance in the history of this country. It is a shortcoming for the seminar and this collection not to have a paper on the role of women in that movement. Due to some unavoidable circumstances, the paper could not be presented.

The problems that women face in the society are linked to other peoples issues. The roots of those issues are in the system in which the exploiting classes exploit their labor. APCMS believes that only after dismantling this system of exploitation and making the New Democratic Revolution a success can Women's liberation find a way. APCMS strives to build a women's movement with this very understanding. As part of the same effort it organized on all Indian Level seminar on the role of women in different working class movements.

Repression leads to resistance. So the Indian history of the part fifty years is not only the history of exploitation. It is also the history of exploitation. It is also the history of fifty years of struggles against that exploitation. Among those struggles, workers movements form the main-stream, since the latter belong to a majority of people. They also have the nature of leading to a systemic change and a protecting the interests of the people of all other sections through such change.

From the revolt of spartacus to the revolutions of the modern era, there has been no struggle with no role of women in it. Especially in all the struggle that changed the course of human history, that is that aimed at transforming the system women had a role. This fact cannot be concealed. Even in India in all the agrarian, adivasi, workers struggle against the British, the landlords and the capitalists, women participated heroically and made sacrifices.

The year 1947 could not bring any change, in the lives of women. So resuming their tradition of struggles women had to inevitably come back into movements. The struggles that took place before 1947 like Punapravailor, Chittagong and Tebhaga struggles, and the heroic Telangana struggle that stretched before and after 1947 gave us the insight that, what happened on August 15, 1947 was only a transfer or power and in essence there was no Independence. The legacy of those struggles continued in Naxalbary, Srikakulam, North Telangana, Dandakaranya and other such movements that began in late 1960's and have been continuing till now.

Worker's movements are the movements led by workers against the economic exploitating and social repression that target them. With Paris commune, proletarian class accepted the responsibility, in practice, of liberating the whole of humanity from exploitation and of pression. (Its chief companion in an agrarian country like India is the peasantry) Revolutionary movements are the workers movements that are led with this objective. They represent the interests of working class people. They focus on the issues of working class men and women and work with the agenda of attaining state power for them. That is why one finds in the collection both the struggles led by women for improving their working condition and those movements that aim at total transformation of the system.

We, who have the goal of achieving state power for the oppressed people (and for women who are part of them), wanted to analyze for ourselves the role of women so far in the Indian working class movement and to enhance their spirit of participating in such movements in future and the thought to increase their role in them. Hence their seminar. However history is not just about the part. It gets built all the time. The Naxalbary and the Srikakulam did not just stop in the 70's. They are continuing now. Only when we understand not only the past history but the present history as well, we can build the future. Some who are ready to discuss academically the past struggles and women's role in them are not prepared to recognize and discuss the contemporary history. (The frightful "silence" to the state violence against the women in these struggles and the areas of these struggles is a proof) APCMS has tried to record the present also as history.

The most significant aspect of this Seminar is the lack of distance that is often found in academic seminar between practice and theory. Here it was the working class women, the women who are participating in the working class movements, themselves spoke on "The women in Indian working class movements". Defying the tradition of only intellectuals participating in Seminars, it was mainly working class women who participated in the seminar as delegates. (The rest were also deeply identified themselves with the movements) Their practice is the guiding star for the liberation of women in India.

The practice of struggle as well as the attempt to give it a theoretical form, both are their own. This is the real success that the women achieved in this seminar. If the women, who were exploited for generations and oppressed by patriarchy in many ways, have achieved this, one can imagine the amount of conflict and the number of sacrifices they must have suffered and made. One of the delegates worked hard to lean to read and write in a very short time in order to present a paper in this seminar. Dispelling several doubts as the whether they would have enough awareness in view of their age and literacy levels, they were

able to answer all questions, which became possible because they came directly from the struggles. For the same reason some delegates could not make it to the seminar. The bomogeouis state did not allow them to attend the seminar precisely because their struggles target this system of exploitation. The papers in the seminar help them to the rise their practice. As mentioned above this effort (the orisation) needs to go on.

The ruling classes always dealt out injustice to peoples history and much more to working class women's history. This seminar is only a beginning in the effort to record the struggle experiences of working class women and the conclusions that are arrived at. Struggles continue as long as exploitation and oppression don't end. We not only record them but also analyze and in the light if the experience form an action plan. This is an on going process. We are proud of having taken up a historic responsibility of recording a small stretch of that journey. We are of course aware that this could not be possible without that help of several people.

Our thanks are due to all the friends who sent their papers as soon as we asked them and the translators who translated some papers from English and some to English from Telugu. Our thanks also to many friends who composed these well and extended many kinds of help.

Though we brought the collection of papers in Telugu by Feb. 98 itself, an undue delay was there in bringing the English Edition. We regret it sincerely and thank everyone who helped us in bringing out the English Edition.

People are the builders of history. The real leaders are those women who participated and are participating in the working class movements. Offering our tributes to all those women who lost their lives in Indian Working class movements, we bring forward this collection before you.



WOMEN IN INDIAN WORKING CLASS MOVEMENTS

- Inaugural address by Chief Guest Com. Krishnabai

We are half of the sky, half of the struggle and half of every human activity. In fact, our contribution is more than half in several aspects. When it comes to labour, our share is three-fourths. The very base of society is labour. Labour plays a very important role in shaping up a society. It is proved more than once that the essence of history is exploitation of labour.

Leaf through the pages of history, you will find references to fierce battles at every crucial turn. In the ancient times, matriarchy was in vogue where progeny used to get identity through mothers. But the system was ruthlessly obliterated, paving the way for patriarchy. Since then, both patriarchy and private property have been eating away the vitals of human society. We have to keep this in mind while understanding the problems that dogged us.

Feudalism has taken roots like a banyan tree in all the countries. Patriarchy gelled well with feudalism. India has got an added feature – caste. Instead of uprooting the feudalism, during their long presence here colonial rulers made friends with the local feudal lords to accelerate the exploitation. The struggles and movements organised during that time were not limited to fighting the British Rule. Some of them were aimed at bringing about reforms, challenging the feudal value system.

We need to have a comprehensive reassessment of the Freedom Struggle. People from backward castes, farmers, labourers, workers, 'terrorists', reformists, revolutionaries and women had taken part in the struggle. All of them plunged into the struggle after becoming conscious of the harsh realities of life. A good number of them had opposed the feudal culture and ideology. Several women laid down their lives while fighting the British forces and the local zamindars. Matangi Hazare from Midnapore was one among such valiant women freedom fighters. Gunnamma of Mandasa and Viyyamma in Gajullanka became martyrs in the struggles against the zamindars in their respective areas. Several class struggles, too, were organised during the period. Parallel to the nationalist movement, Communists organised struggles to protect the interests of the working class. Tebhaga, Telengana and Worli struggles

were some examples. Land was the focal point in all these struggles in which women participated in large numbers. In the Worli struggle, women were in the forefront.

After the transfer of power, advisasis have taken up at ned struggles questioning the very basic tenets of the system and seeking to change it. Of these struggles, the Naxalbari and Srikakulam Armed Tribal Movement were qualitative. Women had played a very important role in these struggles. Seven women and four children were killed in the police firing at Naxalbari in May, 1967. Of the 300 martyrs in the Srikakulam movement, there were 25 women.

The women activists were not just passive onlookers. They were in the leadership too. Leaders like Panchadi Nirmala and Vempatapu Bharati headed dalams and played their part to further the struggle. Activists like Ankamma, Saraswati, Sukki and Jayamma had taken an active role and helped the movement gain important and qualitative leads. Hundreds of adivasi women dared the landlords in several villages and participated in the huge Adivasi women's conference held on October 31, 1967, at Mondemkhal. (Incidentally, this is where Koranna and Manganna, the first martyrs of the historic movement, were killed.)

In Uddanam, a large number of women under the leadership of Panchadi Nirmala attacked the landlord Garudabhadra Kamesu and seized paddy.

Kamesu attracted the wrath of women because he had forcibly taken flags from the agitating women. There were scores of incidents of attacks on landlords, shavukars (merchants) and police informers and seized loan deeds and land patta papers and burnt them. They also seized paddy stock amassed by shavukars by exploiting the adivasis and distributed the same to the people. These were not some adventurous strugges led by a couple of leaders. Hundreds and thousands of people had taken part in these acts of revenge. Women, too, participated in large numbers.

The then Congress Government had put down the widespread movement and killed hundreds of people. They deployed huge military forces and fired on the people indiscriminately and burnt a number of villages. Hundreds of women were raped. They could suppress the movement but the basic problems of the people remained unsolved and unattended. But the historic Srikakulam movement had forced the State to enact the 1/70 Act, the implementation of which was failed miserably.

The movement, which had suffered a setback in Srikakulam, has taken roots in North Telangana in the form of Jagityala Jaitrayatra in 1978.

The women, who participated in the Srikakulam movement, still recount the hardships they faced in those times. Despite the setback of this movement, the spirit it gave had triggered several such struggles all over.

A number of struggles were carried out for land and livelihood. After 1967, struggles erupted in Gujarat, Bihar and Maharshtra demanding food, sugar, edible oils and kerosene. Women held dharnas in fronts of revenue offices to press for their demands. In most cases, they were lathicharged. The ruling classes were completely shaken by the fisherwomen's struggle in Kerala, workers' strike in Tamil Nadu and militant struggles in Chattisgarh. They were forced to bring in land reforms into their election agendas. But women had exposed the true face of these land reforms through their struggles. For example, women in Bodhgaya organised a movement to demand for their rights due to them. The women pooh-poohed men's claim that they were the masters of the fields and that they owned the farm produce "Even we can till the land - we can do that using shovels, if not with yokes. We sow the seeds, pluck out the weed and cut the crop. But why can't we own the land?" they asked. They demanded that pattas should be on their name. "What's the point in taking up the land reforms? Sons get the hereditary rights on the land. In-laws keep the jewellery we bring along from our parents. Husbands drink and gamble to waste the land away. But mothers struggle to run the family. So, the rights on the land should be equally distributed to both men and women," the agitating women demanded.

As a result of these struggles, women did get their due in 1982. Of the 1,000 acres distributed in some Bihari villages that year, women got 100 acres.

"We have mouths but we cannot talk. We have legs but cannot walk on our own. But we have got the strength to talk and walk after getting the land," the confident women said.

But men, who realized soon that women were becoming too difficult to handle after the getting the land, have started attempts for joint ownership of the land. Their excuse was that women couldn't do rounds

around the banks and government offices for loans. "We have to do all this thankless job. But to do this, we need to have rights on the land," they murmured.

But women scuttled their designs. "We toil no less. Even we are used for the long walks for doing menial jobs and fetching drinking water. We don't need your help," they told their husbands.

The hard realities of life make people realize the importance of struggles. They hone their fighting spirit as they go along and gain experience. The creative participation in the struggles give raise to creative questions, which, in turn, would lead them to further understand the reality. Otherwise, can we imagine how women, labeled as those who remain indoors, have become so assertive and started fighting for their rights.

The women in Uttar Pradesh went a step further and led the popular Chipco movement. The Government used to give licences to contractors for felling trees and selling the wood for huge profits. The widespread felling of trees had led to depletion of ground water. Once a fertile land, many areas in the State had become parched lands. The ecological balance, too, got disturbed. This also had a direct bearing on the living conditions of the people. Women had to walk for miles to fetch water and firewood. Finding it hard, women had opposed the Government's decision and demanded that this practice should not be continued. Notwithstanding their protests, contractors continued to swallow vast forest areas for their selfish gains. Then a large number of women hugged trees and challenged the contractors to fell them. A popular folk poet wrote songs on this historic movement and sang them across the State.

Asked how did they get the idea of hugging the trees to save them, they replied "we cuddle our children to give them warmth and assurance. We did the same with trees to save for forests, because our lives depended on them."

The Uttar Pradesh Government had no other option but to ban the practice for 15 years in 1978.

In Maharashtra, a feudal lord beat an adivasi woman and raped her in Dhulia district. The woman didn't leave it like that. She reported the incident to the association in which she was a member. A number of women from various villages in the area went to the police station and lodged a complaint. But there was no response from the police. The protesters then asked their sarpanch to look into the issue. He, too, didn't take any action. After running from pillar to post, the women themselves got into the action and attacked the offender and dragged him to the streets and paraded him, sitting him on a donkey. Then, the police swung into action and arrested the women and not the rape accused!

"We do know where your loyalties are. That's why we had decided to teach him a lesson," a gathering of 500-600 women shouted in front of the police station.

We hear about such spontaneous struggles quite regularly. But how can the backward adivasi women muster courage to organise such struggles? Obviously, it's the strength of the collective.

The women had risen to the occasion and fought valiantly when the imperialist poisonous gases killed thousands of people in Bhopal. The magnitude of some of the struggles some times was quite large and witnessed a number of associations joining hands to put up a united fight. The Sati of Roop Kanwar and rapes of Ramiza Bee and Madhura were some examples to show how women could organise large-scale protest campaigns.

People find solutions from the problems they face. The anti-liquor movement is case in a point. We all know how a small protest at Godavarikhani in 1990 evolved into a mammoth struggle. "Reducing arrack prices will not do. We are asking for the closure of arrack shops and bars," women members of Sikasa (Singareni Karmika Samakhya) thundered and showed the way for the Revolutionary movement along the Godavari valley and North Telangana to oversee a voluntary ban on the sale of liquor. The Government was left with no option but to sell liquor at police stations. Dubagunta women triggered a large-scale anti-liquor movement in the State. The women had creatively used newer forms of protest, forcing the Government to ban arrack. But we all know how sincere is the Government in enforcing that ban. There is a reformist element in this movement. Yet, it's quite heartening to know that women are participating in this movement in huge numbers.

Women are getting bolder and braver. While attacks on women on the raise, resistance from women too getting stronger and taking newer forms. The recent protest against gang rape of a minor girl in Visakhapatnam led to the denial of bail to the accused.

But it's not just enough to fight against issues with a limited scope such as attacks on women, beauty contests and dowry. There is an im-

mediate need to wage a wide and united struggle against the religion, which has been deceiving the womenfolk. Besides other forms of repression, no religion does justice to women the right to property front.

It's a mistake to think that man alone is responsible for all our woes. We should be able to see the designs of the system and the culture being promoted by the ruling classes, which rejuvenates male hegemony. Women have to analyse these and participate in people's movements. The freedom of women should be made an integral part of people's movements.

The women in North Telangana and Dandakaranya are rewriting the history through their constructive movements. Thousands of women sacrificed their lives in Nicaragua and El Salvador. Women in Bolivia had devised several new forms to further their struggles.

While analysing our problems, we should be able to realise that all these problems are intertwined with larger social, economic and political problems. This is very important to take our struggles into a higher orbit.

We are surrounded by imperialism from outside and semi-feudal system within the country. Feudal values coupled with imperialist culture are making us gasp for breath. It is making us prisoners of 't eauty', fashions and jewellery. It is trying to addict us with a kind of plastic civilisation. Consumer culture has turned woman into a tool to sell MNC products. Some of the middle class women are falling prey to this culture and participating in beauty contests. They should realise that it's a vicious circle and do no good, either to them or to their families. They have to get rid of this by launching a fight against these lures. On other hand, a number of middle class women are becoming socially conscious and becoming part of social movements. All the progressive elements should welcome this development.

Those who are pushed to the wall for long will always be in the forefront in all the struggles. It's no choice. It is an inevitable course for them to take to tread along. Because they cannot survive unless they fight day in and day out.

Post 1980, religion acquired a militant form. They follow the footsteps of Golvalkar who called for militarisation of Hinduism and Hiduisation of politics. The ruling classes are well aware that the people would not insist on the promises they made. Because all their promises

are be realised in the other loka (world) and not here in this "mundane world". As if this is not enough, imperialism has stepped in around the same time. Imperialism is putting in place the New Economic Policy, New Education Policy and LPG (Liberalisation, Privatisation and Globalisation) to carry forward its agenda.

But, theirs is Globalisation
Ours is Global Village
Theirs is Globalisation
Ours is Global war
Long Live Women's Movements
Long Live social movements.

Women's movement that ran parallel to the Telangana armed peasant struggle

- Com. Ratnamala

Stree Sakhti Sanghatana interviewed women who participated in the Telangana struggle. After completing almost all the interviews, we wanted to conduct a meeting at Hyderabad with the interviewees. I feel that it is appropriate to start this paper with the speech given by Adivamma, a squad member of the Telangana armed peasant struggle, in the meeting at Hyderabad.

"Master, or servant, your house, or my house, husband, or wife, female, or male, everyone runs according to the power. Look, we have to bring that power into our hands. Ladies and gentlemen! I am telling you from my experience. We must not fight amongst ourselves. We have to fight with the rich people. All of us must unite together. If we quarrel amongst ourselves, the one who has the power gets a chance to exploit us. Let us fight with the rich people, who are making your life, my life, women's life, and everyone's life miserable. Let us get rid off their domination. Let all of us unite and fight."

Telangana armed peasant struggle has liberated three thousand villages and established village states. A Ten Lac acre of land was distributed to the poor. This struggle enabled many women like Adivamma to liberate themselves from the exploitation of feudal values, suppression of family and prepared them to fight for the liberation of society. Women played an important role in the armed people's struggle that took place between 1946 and 1951. They fought against patriarchal values, viz., confining women to the four walls of the house, treating women as the property of men treating women as sexual objects. They fought for economic and cultural equality. They boldly questioned the society. The efforts that were put up by the armed peasant movement, women's movement and women's struggles in bringing awareness in women helped to enhance the personality of women.

Social reform movement under the leadership of Raja Ram Mohan Rai, Jyothi ba Phoole, Kandukuri Veeresalingam towards the end of 19th century, to bring a change in the conditions of women, to create

awareness in women, enabled a change in the conditions, and in the intellectual development of women. But the participation of women in social movements took place in the beginning of 20th century. Their maiden participation took place in the national movement. But even today these movements have no clear-cut understanding or perception on the liberation of women and on complete equality between men and women.

Women's movements that formed part of peasant struggles against rich landlords after 1939 in the country introduced practically the feelings concerning the liberation of women, complete equality beween men and women into the country's political agenda. Telangana armed peasant struggle against the tyrannical Nizam's rule, Tebhaga movement in Bengal and other women movements are examples for his. These movements tried to understand the root cause for the present status of women inside and out side the family and tried to solve it. They understood the relation between the suppression of women inside and outside the family and the social hierarchy. They undertook programs to bring equality between men and women. The movement understood the relation between the problems of women and the inequaliies between men and women, and its inextricable relation with the society and tried to coordinate both by undertaking activities and building organisational structures. But this dialectical historical material outlook continued only for some time. Women accepted traditional values as natural ones, and patiently bore the brunt of the effect, agonies, and repression, atrocities that were thrust on them by the social ups and lowns. But the dawn, which helped to bring social change, has sudlenly stopped. It is essential to review those experiences by the present lay women's movements.

The status of women in those days:

In 2,25,000 villages of Nizam's rule, education, medical, transport facilities were almost nil. Forty per cent of the land was in the lands of jagirdars and maktedars. People had to pay heavy taxes. This made their life more miserable. Dowry system was prevalent in the rich, middle class, and in upper castes. In the backward castes another system called 'oli' (boy gives money to the girl's family at the time of marriage) was prevalent. Whatever form it may be, whether dowry or li, it had its ill effect on women only. Literacy rate was poor. General teracy rate was 8.5 per cent and women's literacy rate was 1.5 percent.

Middle class women were confined to the four walls of the house and they never knew what was happening in the outside world. They suffered a lot in the parda system and culture of Nizam rulers. Though women participated in the social production outside the house, the bitter reality was that women belonging to working class and middle class could not resist the sexual advances made by the landlords. Women could not question polygamy in the rich, middle classes.

The lives of "aadapapa" are still worse. They never had a life of their own. They were treated as chattels and were sent in the form of dowry to the in-laws' house of the owner's daughter. They led a terrible life. Married women too had to work hard. They had to bore many children. In such lives the only recreation they had was doing some embroidery work on their sarees and blouses or singing songs from the epics like Damayanthy sitha and the like. More or less it is the same with the working class women also, may be the tunes are different. But the Telangana armed peasant struggle shook the lives of women. Women sang the songs about Ayilamma's land struggle, about the heroic martyrdom of Komarayya. They took Maxim Gorky's "mother" as their role model. Women undertook active role in all the fields of the struggle. They worked as guerilla squad members, commanders, couriers, and members of different people's organisations, party committees. They fulfilled the responsibility of maintaining dens. In order to know the stage of development during the struggle period, it is necessary to know about Narasamma Khammam squad member, who questioned leadership of the party about the methods and forms of struggle relating to the issues of women. This is a great example.

Narasamma joined the squad in 1950. She was 20 years old at that time. She was given party membership in 1951. In the words of Comrade Puchhlapalli Sundaraiah, Narasamma came from poor peasant family. She was an active member. She used to search for new methods to complete the program that was given to her. Whenever she spoke, listeners never got bored. She used to tell them in a simple and understanding way. She tried to develop the activities. Narasamma was not literate at the time of joining the squad. In the period of two years she developed theoretically. Earlier she never opened her mouth before men. But after joining the squad she questioned the leadership of the party. Her personality was developed. This enables us to understand the opportunity that was given to her by the movement.

"People moved in large numbers during the struggle days against Nizam Razakars. They never took initiative to work on their own. They tried to do each and every work. Same trend continued even after the arrival of Indian army. People could not participate in the struggles because of the continuing repression. Though the people could not participate we thought we should go on with the programs on our own. But the changed path proved we were wrong. Based on the information that came to the squads, blindly relying on the information, squads killed some people by mistake. Today orders were given to the squads that they have to concentrate their strength in destroying the military personnel. In fact, military is ahead. They are moving day and night."

Narasamma pointed out political struggles, strategies and tactics but also the patriarchal attitude of the leadership towards women "Even now women are treated low — this attitude is being continued. Party leadership imposes heavy punishment if any woman is found committing a mistake. Everyone comes to know about this. We should be given good training to develop ourselves. We should not be belittled. If we move freely, we are looked upon with doubt. Why not a single woman was allowed to participate in special military actions by the squads?" she questioned the leadership.

She even suggested that theoretical study must be developed. "Members of the party must be given good training at least for few days. Especially how to escape from the enemy must be taught. Precautionary measures are not taken in the matters concerning the safety of the members of the party. Books that could be understood by us must be provided to us. Special care must be taken for this purpose."

Here one must notice one point. Women who came from the lower strata of society and who were illiterate could able to transform themselves as complete persons in the movement. They excelled the literate women who came from the rich, middle class sections. They could expressed their independent views without any compromise in the matters relating to the warpath, cultural values, and in the matters of retaining their individuality. They put their view into practice. The same was not the case in case of women who came from upper castes, middle class and rich sections. At the time when party remained aloof they, ike ordinary housewives, bowed their heads to the views of the society, of the authority exercised by their husbands. For example, Drachchamamba gave an undertaking to the jail officials to the effect that

she is relinquishing her state presidentship post to the women's organisation. She did this at the behest of her husband. Lalita burnt her tongue with a golden string to "purify" herself because she worked in the movement for a longtime and became "unholy". She did this due to her family's pressure.

Chilakamma belonged to the backward class and she was an illeterate. Though her husband was an agent of Congress, she remained as a Communist. She sacrificed here life while escaping from the Nizam's army. Chilakamma belonged to Duggepalle of Miryalagudem taluka in Nalgonda district. Nizam's army surrounded the village in 1947. She threw chilli powder into the eyes of the soldiers and escaped. But she could not run fast as she was in the advanced stage of her pregnancy and she jumped into a well and died. We see, even today, women singing the history of Chilakamma at the time of sowing the seeds, cutting the crops in many areas of Nalgonda district. Chilakamma song took different forms in different areas.

Women like Chilakamma laid down their lives in the movement in hundreds and thousands. They stood firm even in case of severe repression. Nizam's police, Razakars, Union Army committed several atrocities on women in the village of Aakunuru Machireddy. Padmaja Naidu, daughter of Sarojini Naidu, Congress leader, gave a call to the entire women folk in the country to resist such atoricities in a large scale.

Padmaja Naidu visited the villages of Aakunur Mac ireddypalli, Chandanapalli, Mota Kodur Balem, and Old Suryapet and made the following statement.

"Many a village became victim to the officers barbaric activities. People could not resist the atrocities committed by the police. They fled to far away areas leaving their entire property behind."

"Police have cruelly tortured the villagers of Aakunur. Police excelled the fascists in humiliating women."

"Without leaving even a single house all the houses were searched in the nighttime. They beat up the men. Arrested them. They abused women. They looted the cash and jewellery. They raped the women"

"When police were raping a 16-year-old girl, her husband went to her rescue. But the police dragged him away and threatened to kill him. She was raped in front of him." "There was no house which was not searched. There was no woman who was not humiliated. One woman was raped in front of her brother-in-law. They did not leave pregnant women and lactating mothers also. Many terrible things than this happened. Being a lady I can not describe them."

The call given by Padmaja Naidu holds good even today that "all the women and women's organizations in Hyderabad should come forward to stop such atrocities on women. An intensifying struggle should be built across the country for the right of women. We all should fulfill our responsibility towards the women of Aakunuru Machireddypalle, Chandanapalle, Kakarla motakoduru".

Women's movement mainly moved in two directions at the time of Telangana armed struggle. One, even though there were not any special women's organizations in the area of movement, an awareness was created to bring equality between men and women and it was made as an internal part of every struggle and a programme was chalked out towards the liberation of women. Second the women's organization that had grown along the lines of communist movement which stood as the strong support to the direct struggle.

In the area of Telangana, women were given a representation in the organizational structure and in the village administration. Movement took special interest in developing awareness about the equality between men and women.

"Village committees declared that men and women have equal rights. They conducted a movement for this purpose. Women were elected for gram panchayat committees (They have decided to elect at east two women in the five committees). It is natural that local people know more about family conditions, and mutual relations in the family. Hence Village committees solved the disputes in the family. Without bringing any pressure on the views of the people disputes were resolved on the basis of equality of men and women. They stopped forced marriages — where girls were forced to marry men in whom they have no interest. Based on the situation divorces were given. Opportunity to ead a respectful life (Experiences from Telanagna struggle - Sundaraiah; page 153) village committees tried to put into practice the proposals that were put forward by Devulapalli Venkateswara Rao, Baddam Yellareddy in the people's cabinet relating to women in the Andhra Maha Sabha in 1944.

- 1) Women should be given property right. She should not be discriminated from her brothers as far as property right is concerned.
- 2) Child marriages must be abolished. Women below 14 years, men below 18 years should not be allowed to marry. After the completion of their minority, men and women should have a right to marry through registration. Widow remarriages must be allowed. Divorces in special circumstances must be allowed.
- 3) Special facilities must be provided for the educational development of women and vocational training of women.
- 4) Pregnant women must be given five weeks of leave with full salary for five weeks before the delivery and for six weeks after the delivery. Medical facilities must be provided for easy delivery. Trained midwives must be made available. Special wards for pregnant women must be opened in the hospitals of the cities.
- 5) Setbacks that were present in giving jobs to women must be removed. They have to be given equal wages for the same work on part with men.

In Andhra area since 1942 state women's organization under the leadership of communist women has been fighting for the right to property for women. Communist activists have been working in district level women's organizations since 1937. Krishna district women's organization was formed in 1938. From 1938 to 1941 they have been working in state level organizations as constituent bodies of all India Women's conference (AIWC). But whatever activities these organizations undertook were fundamentally different from All-India Women's conference. These women's organizations worked on the fundamental problems of women at village level. These organizations worked with an awareness to help the exploited section and looked at the problems from woman's angle and class outlook. All-India Kisan meet was held in Bezawada in 1948. Among those who participated in this meeting, five per cent of them were women. They belonged to the peasant family and they told the newsmen in their interview that they wanted to establish women's organizations to solve the problems of women. By the time of imposition of ban in 1948 membership in the state women's organization was 4,500. Village level, taluka level committees were working at that time. State women's Organization published a monthly magazine called 'Andhra Vanitha'. In 1948 government has imposed a ban on the women's organization and also on the magazine.

Women who participated in the struggle, are either in Andhra area, or in Telangana faced restrictions. They resisted these restrictions. They participated in the struggle by resisting families and society. When the husbands stopped their wives from going to training classes for self-protection, Women questioned them "You can not protect us. When we are prepared to learn to protect ourselves you will not allow." (P.Sundaraiah, Telangana Struggle, page 195).

According to the details stated then, about the structure of women's organizations, it was very difficult to establish organizations in the initial stages. They started working on the basic issues like providing lavatory facilities, health centers, improving the health of women and children, maintenance of children, right to property, dowry problem. They visited the villages, conducted group meetings. They established village organizations and formed committees. Not only that, they established libraries. They opened reading rooms. They mobilized women and during rest period they used to read many things to women there by increasing reading habit in the women. They fought for drinking water facility in the towns, and for providing lavatory facility in the villages and achieved success. Because of these good results people showered affection and care on them. This enabled them to form women's organizations. Women activists actively participated in the activities of the organization (Andhra Pradesh women's movement history - Motur, udayam).

The government has appointed B.N. Rao committee in 1944. It submitted its report. By suggesting the weaknesses, amendments in the report they have sent memoranda to the government with 50,000 signatures.

From 1943 to 1947 movement's activities continued at high level. By then state organization was not formed. But organizations at the village, taluka, district levels were formed and activities were undertaken by coordinating all the districts. They ran a propaganda campaign against Japan fascist actions in 1942. They conducted classes for training to treat the wounded people, to escape from bomb attacks. Self protection squads with women activities were formed in some districts.

Political Classes:

They had conducted political classes for 800 people for one month and gave training to women activists. They were given training in history, political science, health, and delivery, grooming the children, songs

and in other cultural activities, martial arts, and self-defence methods. After completing their training 200 women activists, wearing khaki shirt and trouser, did march past in the streets of Vijayawada.

There is a qualitative change in this movement than the earlier women's movements. This movement mainly brought out a few important issues to the fore:

- 1) Class outlook, exploited section's outlook was taken into consideration.
- 2) Movement clearly understood the relation between the issue of women and the structure, form and nature of society.
- 3) Earlier women were not able to open their mouth before the land-lords. This movement transformed them into complete persons.
- 4) Even though they had to work with the women belonging to sections other than the working class, they never compromised on the issues or on the theory.
- 5) Despite the fact that they could not theorize their experiences in that short period of time movement had dialectical materialistic outlook and that is remained as a model even today.

Women in Tebhaga peasant struggle

- New Democratic Youth Federation, West Bengal

Tebhaga peasant struggle was a landmark in the history of Indian peasant struggle. In the extensiveness of the movement, in the intensity of emotion and in the expression of class hatred, Tebhaga was one of the greatest movements in the Indian Democratic revolution. The movement which was sparked by the oppressed peasantry of rural Bengal in Sep 1946 spread like wildfire throughout the length and breadth of the then united Bengal by Nov, 1948. About 60 lakh peasant masses rose on their feet in the struggle to establish their rights. That was the life and death struggle of the sharecroppers as well as the whole poor and middle peasants to get the fair share of their produce. And in this great movement, the women of rural Bengal who were oppressed by feudalism, colonial rule and the patriarchy for centuries not only took active role, but also led the struggle in many occasions.

The spark of Tebhaga movement started on the question of share-croppers' rights. Till then the landlords used to grab half of the produced crops from the peasants without spending any money or labour of their own for the produce. There was no security for the tenancy of the producer sharecroppers. The landlords can evict them at their sweet will. Against this system the main and principal demands of the share-croppers was that either the landlord would bear the expense of the production or the sharecroppers would get two thirds of the produce and he can not be evicted from the land. In this struggle the landless and poor peasantry joined in mass, though their interest was not directly attached with this movement. In fact, Tebhaga peasant struggles was an united upsurge of the whole peasantry against their exploiter, the parasite landlords and jotedar class.

The background of the movement:

The history of peasant struggle in India for centuries was that of class struggle against imperialism and landlords. The hatred and resentment of the peasantry found its expression through several rebellions and upsurge against British colonial rule as well as feudalism. From Sannyasi rebellion to (1763) to the rebellion of 'Gazi' (1767), the Birbhum mass rebellion (1785-86) the first and second rebellion of

Maymonsingh, the 'Wahabi' rebellion (1831), the Santal rebellion (1855-56), the great rebellion of 1856 and the rebellion against Indigo planters - all these preceded the Tebhaga movement.

After the East India company took over the Dewani of Sube Bengal in 1765 and establish the permanent settlement of landlords in 1793 giving them rights of land and revenue, a new land relation emerged in the womb of the age old feudal system which connected our agriculture with the world capitalist system. As a result, our peasantry was subjected to inhuman exploitation, oppression and hunger. All these created a great volcano, which burst out in the form of several peasant rebellions, culmination in Tebhaga and Telangana. The British rulers deprived the peasantry of their rights on land and created a new section of landlords through permanent settlement. But seeing the continuous resentment they passed a land - rent law in 1859. In that law those peasants were granted land tenancy who were cultivating the same part of land for long time giving the same rent. But still a large section of peasants remained as sharecroppers those who have no tenant rights. The land tenancy act was amended again in 1985 extending land tenancy to a greater section of peasantry.

In 1929, the price of agricultural produce fell drastically due to the world-wide crisis of capitalism. The poor peasants had to sell the land, whatever in their possession to the landlords. Which again increased the number of sharecroppers to a great extent.

After the break of 2nd world war in 1939 rampant hoarding and speculation became the order of the day which resulted in severe inflation and skyrocketing prices. In 1943, the price of rice rose 20 times than pre world war period. People began to sell their utensils, cattle whatever land they possess just to feed their families. Without getting any food in the villages, lakhs of peasant families left the villages and crowded in the cities in the hope of getting some gruel for their survival. Around 30 lakh people perished in the famine of 1943. The sale of land increased by 15 times in the famine year according to the Register of land registration office. The rich became richer by 20 times, whereas the middle and poor peasants became destitute overnight. The total wealth was accumulated in the hands of the landlords and moneylenders.

Thus the peasants who survived the family remained as landless and sharecroppers. Among the whole rural population 70-75% became either sharecroppers or poor and landless peasants. Besides the policy

of evicting peasants from the lands, the inhuman paddy lending system (lending the paddy in lean season and extracting double the amount after harvesting) began to exploit the peasantry in the crudest form. Other than this the landlords and moneylenders used to intervene even in the family life of the peasants. They had to give illegal doles to the landlords even for selling their produce in the market. In fact, the share-croppers could enjoy a very small part of their crops they produced through hard labours. These producers of golden crops who remained helpless and starved due to this severe exploitation and oppression began to organise themselves at last resulting in the movement called Tebhaga.

The two fold exploitation on women in rural Bengal:

The women were exploited on the one hand economically by the landlord class and by the feudal patriarchy on the other. Though they used to participate in the social production, they had no economic rights. Moreover they had to do all the household works without expressing a single word of discontent. Other than exploited by the landlord class, the peasant women were also exploited by their husbands and the male dominated society as a whole. They were exchanged along with money or property in the inhuman marriage system and became the property of the husbands. They had no right what so ever in this feudal social system where they were subjected to various sexual oppressions. In the courthouse of the landlords the poor peasants and sharecroppers were brought in some pretext or other and were oppressed where also the women were the worst sufferers. Even in the marriage of the peasants the landlords usually intervened and exercised their right, on the newly wed bride. Many peasants women and widows had to work in the landlords' houses and fields in the daytime, where as they were exploited sexually by the landlords at night. Thus in this feudal system the women were exploited both economically and sexually by the landlord. In the Tebhaga movement these peasant women stood on their feet against this inequality, inhuman suppression and hunger.

Conscious efforts behind the movement:

When the peasantry of rural Bengal was suffering from untold misery in the hands of feudalism and imperialism, at that time in 1936, All India Peasant Association was formed under the leadership of

communist party. And in 1937, Bengal provincial peasant association was formed through a conference in the bank-ura district. The peasant manifesto raised a host of demands; abolition of the landlord system, abolition of all debts and rights to crops to the sharecroppers.

At the same time the British rulers were interested in the change of the existing Zamindari system, as they felt that landlords were extracting illegal rents from the peasants which were not deposited to the state. The British appointed Floud Commission calculated the total income of the landlords in Bengal, Bihar and Orissa and sent its report to the government in 1940. It suggested that the state should be directly acquire the ownership of the land and collect the revenue by itself. The 4th conference of peasant sabha held in Jessore district raised the demand for the implementation of the report of the Floud commission.

The 2nd world war and the consequent famine of 1943 destroyed the whole economy and subsequently the peasants began to get organised in one after another anti imperialist and anti feudal struggle. In this situation in 1946 the provincial peasant conference held in Khulna district demanded the formation of legalisation on 'Tebhaga right' at the sharecroppers. In September of the same year the provincial Kishan council announces for the implementation of Tebhaga. The main demands were:

- 1. Two third of the produce for the sharecroppers.
- 2. Occupational right to the sharecroppers.
- 3. The crops should be brought to the storehouse of the sharecroppers instead of the landlords.

Thus started the heroic struggle of the oppressed of the oppressed and destitute peasantry, a great struggle of self-sacrifice of both men and women, a life and death struggle against the oppressed exploiting classes. It first started in the North Bengal districts of Dirajpur, Rangpur and Jalpaiguri and spread like a wildfire and maymansingh, Khulna, Jessore, Midnapore, 24 Paraganas, Howra Hooghly districts and the whole of united Bengal. As far as the intensity and extent is concerned the movement can be divided into three phases.

First: From Nov 1946 to January 1947.

Second: From Feb 1947 to April 1947

Third: From April 47 onwards.

Women's participation:

The extent of women's participation in the Tebhaga movement could be understood from the fact that among the martyrs of the movement nearly 30% were women.

The movement for the seizure of crop started from Rampur village of Thakurgaoh subdivision in the district of Dinapur. In this struggle on 4th January 1947 two landless peasants Sibram and Samiruddin became martyrs. Becoming panic-stricken seeing the temper of the struggling peasants, the revenue minister of the Govt announced in a mass meeting that the share croppers' Bill will be introduced in the legislative house and legislation on Tebhaga will be promulgated. In the Calcutta Gazette of 2nd January 'Bengal sharecroppers' temporary Bill' was published. But it could not be implemented due to the pressure from the landlord class. Hence the 2nd phase of the movement started in the form of seizure of crops from the storehouses of the landlords.

In Khanpur of Dinajpur district, police began to arrest the peasant activists and the leaders in the midnight of 20th February 1946. Immediately the women of the village under the leadership of Joshada started to make the sound of conch and thousands of peasants gathered in the village hearing that sound. They build up barricade and resisted the police. In the brutal police firing 20 peasants became martyrs including Joshada and our peasant leader Chiar-Si-Sekh. Another heroic women peasant leader Kousalya Rani was also killed in the battlefield.

On 14th December 1946 in Rampur village of Dinajpur district about 100 peasant activists started to cut crops from the landlords' land under the leadership of another heroic lady Deepeswari. They successfully seized all the crops of landlord. But on the next day a huge gang of armed police surrounded the village. Seeing the police Deepeswari immediately started shouting in a loud voice and chased the police with a sickle on her one hand and a stick on the other. The village volunteers force joined with her. Seeing this unexpected bravery of this peasant lady the police came back. The story of Deepeswari spread from one village to another. She became an example before the whole peasantry.

In the village Ranisankali, under the leadership or Bhandani women arrested one policeman due to his insulting uttering towards the women volunteers. Bhandani kept on guarding the policeman with his gun on her shoulder. Particularly the Rajbansi women (Rajbansi is a tribe of North Bengal), created an annal of heroic struggles in the Tebhaga movement.

The women peasant leader of Ranisankali, Jaymani was the wife of a landless peasant Pastaram. Ranisankali stood as a base of peasant struggle even during the setback period. When the police surrounded the village Jaymani gave the leadership in shifting arms from that village and in the ensuing face to face fight with the police she became seriously injured, though she was never arrested.

In the Khanpur village Damini became martyr while fighting against the police with a stick in her hand. And in the district of Dinajpur seven peasant women sacrificed their lives to save the leader of the peasant Sabha 'Doma Singha' from the hands of the police.

In the third phase of struggle when the leaders of the peasant Sabha withdrew the struggle, the peasant persisted in the struggle and created new waves of movement. In Mayman Singh district peasant woman Rasmani gave the leadership to the whole district. When the police tried to rape her, she took revenge by stabbing the policemen and then killed herself.

In Midnapur district Bimala Majhi became the leader of the Tebhaga movement after getting rid off herself from the hands of her oppressing husband. When most of the activists were in jail she took the leadership of the whole district and gave the call to finish landlord Raj.

In Hantal of Howrah district Jashadha Mayi, Sudha Mayi, makha Bala, Satya Bala, Nami Bala and Balika Patra became martyrs after heroic struggle with the police.

By March 47 when the leadership of peasant sabha called to withdraw the Tebhaga movement in face of the state repression, particulary the movement of Kakdwip in the Sunderban area of 24 Paraganas rose new heights. Defying the ban of peasant Sabha, the sharecroppers continued the militant movement of crop seizing. Police camps were established in villages. In September 1949 village Chand pinri witnessed an unprecedented struggle when 14 peasant women be in to resist a 36 policemen armed with rifles. They had only domestic knives and brooms in their hands. When the manager of the landlord who led the police party to the village pulled one young women by hand, one pregnant woman Ahalya beat him down with her broom. Another women Sarajini was then struggling with policeman having a firm grip on his rifle. Batasi and Uttama inflicted wounds on the policeman's hand by their household chopper. Then they fired at Ahalya, the full pregnant peasant lady.

One butcher police pushed his bayonet through abdomen and tore apart the lower belly. Ahalya silently fell on the ground. People in large number gathered hearing the sound of the firing. They saw Ahalya groaning in the pool of blood and a small hand of a little baby coming out from inside the belly of Ahalya as if the blood stained fist of the baby was calling for greater resistance to be built up in the future.

In many places the peasant women built up self-defence squad to resist the attack of the Zamindars. One secret training camp also was organised which was led by Nalini Prabha Ghosh.

In Bara Kamalpur village of Hoogly district also five women laid down their lives in a heroic struggle against the class enemy.

In numerable such incidents of bravery and heroism by the peasant women throughout Bengal marked the glory of Tebhaga movement which is still now fresh in the memory of people in the struggling area and which was spread throughout Bengal through innumerable songs, stories and poems by celebrated writers like Manik Banerjee.

It created great inspiration among the students and youth in the cities and many of them including large number of women comrades went to the struggling areas as volunteers and took active part in the movement.

Possibly, this was the first real awakening among the downtrodden women of Bengal. And the role of women was possibly the gloriest chapter in the great movement of Tebhaga. In fact this movement created a large number of women organiser, propagandist and agitators from among the most backward section of the people that is the rural women of Bengal. Shoulder to Shoulder with men they fought with the police and Zamindars seized and guarded the crops, created great inspiration among the male folk and stood firm to defend their own dignity. Such bravery and sacrifice of which only a few examples were cited here was actually very rarely seen in the anti feudal and anti imperialist struggles of the Indian people.

It shows that if aroused properly through struggles our women also can fight equally with their male counter parts and take equal part in the building of a new society free from all exploitation and opprestion.

Role of women in Srikakulam struggle - Then and now

- Viplava Mahila Sangam, Srikakulam

Due to the failure in understanding semi-feudal and semi-colonial system and in providing leadership to India's exploited people, the revisionist politics turned to selling fruits in the name of the tree. Naxalbari struggle condemned the revisionist politics and proved in practice that liberation of Indian people is possible only through long drawn people's war. The Srikakulam armed struggle of girijans and peasants started in 1968 as a continuation to Naxalbari struggle. Leaders of this struggle such as Vempatapu Satyam, Adibhatla Kailasam, Panchadi Krishnamurthy and Panchadi Nirmala along with 350 others became martyrs. Among them were 25 women.

This struggle, which was primarily concentrated in the plains areas of Sompeta and Tekkali and in Agency areas of Palakonda and Parvatipuram, was spread over 300 villages in 6 talukas and influenced nearly 2 lakh people. It also motivated the exploited people all over AP.

In the early years of the 60s decade, women in plains established women's organizations. In the Agency areas, from 1958 onwards, girijan organizations were formed under the leadership of Comrade Vempatapu Satyam.

Problems of servants, waste land, land forcibly occupied by landlords, exploitation by middle men in coconut groves, interest rates these are all the problems that the movement took up. Women joined the militant organization fighting bonded labour, liquor addiction and atrocities committed on women by landlords and traders. This militant organization was formed by Subbarao Panigrahi in 1960s. It is not possible to fight against the exploitation of landlords, to stop the atrocities on women and to solve the basic problems of people through petitions. It is possible to achieve liberation only by taking risk and fighting. That is the thought with which the militant organization was formed. About 60-70 women initially joined the militant organization from the villages of Boddapadu, Mamidipalli, Rajam, Neelavati, Makanapalli, Marripadu and Garudabhadra. The organization brought together the women and gave them the courage to fight against the atrocities on women. Heed-

ing the call given by the organization, women participated in hunger attacks, stopped the traders from illegally moving grains in lorries and shared those grains among themselves. A number of women also participated in the 2000 strong rally against drought in Sompeta.

Struggles against various problems:

Peasants fought for remunerative prices for their crop. Traders used to weigh the crop with tampered weighing scales, buy the crop for very low prices and make enormous profits in the process. One measure (approximately 3-4 kgs) of seed would be given about Rs 3. The peasants organized themselves and got the rate for one measure increased to Rs 6.

In 1969, each coconut was worth 25 paise. Traders and brahmins used to exploit people and sometimes they would buy 8 coconuts for one rupee. Peasants fought against this and increased the price of each coconut to 50 paise. Similarly, plantains which used to fetch 3 to 4 rupees fetched 5 to 6 rupees after people fought for it. Wages used to be just one rupee after working for the entire day. In fighting against various problems, about 10 - 20 people would form batches, conduct campaigns in villages and bring people together. Gorakala Rambabu (Rajam), Tamada Ganapati (Boddapadu), Subbarao Panigrahi and Konara Chinnarao (Marripadu) and other leaders played an important part in building the movement.

Women in different events:

When about 100 women participated in a procession from Boddapadu to Pallisaradhi under the leadership of organization, the landlord of Garudabhadra, Maddikamesu and his goons stopped the procession at Garudabhadra, pulled the flags from the women and insulted them. At that time, Comrade Panchadi Nirmala slapped the landlord with her slippers and other women also resisted the landlord and his goons.

On november 24th, 1968 about 800 people participated in reaping and controlling the harvest of Garudabhadra landlord Maddikamesu. Comrade Nirmala played an important role in this. The entire leadership participated in the slaying of Konchada Bhuchandra Rao of Akkupalli. Comrades Ankamma, Saraswati, Ramanamma and Jayamma participated in this.

In the incident in which police agent Battina Ramudu of Makanapalli was killed, among the 7 women who participated, Comrade Pothanapalli Saramma (alias Chittakka) was also present. In the incident in Bathupuram in which the houses of landlord and trader were confiscated, 70 people participated. Of them, 7 were women activists (comrades Nirmala, Ankamma, Saraswati, Jayamma, Ramanamma, Chandramma and Saramma). They participated in the incident, killed the landlord and burnt the papers related to loans. They also distributed the 300 tolas of gold they found to the people.

The armed squad reached the village near Kondalogam and Killoi colony. There, they killed Sara Appanna who owned 300 acres of land and hundreds of buffaloes. In that incident, Comrade Nirmala showed a great deal of courage. She dipped her hand in the enemy's blood and wrote the slogan "Long live revolution" on the wall. By then it was three months since she lost her companion Panchadi Krishnamurthy. In this way, the plains women played an important part right from the beginning in the armed struggle.

Srikakulam struggle was primarily girijans struggle. The movement of girijan women started after the struggle took the form of armed struggle. The girijans, who had no right to cultivate and were doing bonded labour and getting exploited, entered the movement.

The occupation of girijan lands by outsider landlords and money lenders, the exploiting traders who gave loans of salt and kerosene and collected enormous interests from girijans and the harassment by forest officers - all these pushed the girijans into the struggle.

By 1967, the girijan sangham spread all over the agency area. Women participated in meetings and processions in thousands.

The Savara tribe is an important one in Agency area. Among them, women work equally with men in agricultural work and they also do household work. There is a custom of bride price among them at the time of marriage. There is also polygamy among them. Women who were partners in production and other aspects, participated along with men in the movement in fighting the exploitation of forest officers and traders.

On October 31, 1967 there was a girijan meeting in Mondemkhallu. About 400 women went for the meeting wearing red sarees, with red flags in their hands and singing revolutionary songs.

While they were going, at Levidi, the landlord Medida Satyam's goons insulted the women, tore their sarees and pulled away the flags from them. Some of the women managed to escape and when they went and informed the meeting in Mondemkhallu about this, hundreds of men and women came to Levidi. Women fought courageously in the fight with the goons. When the landlord's goons used guns to fire, two tribal youth Arika Koranna and Biddika Manganna died on the spot.

In the incident in which Malliveedu landlord was killed (in which thousand participated), Comrade Vempatapu Bharati dipped her hands in enemy's blood and wrote slogans on the wall. In the central squad headed by Vempatapu Satyam, his wife Gunnamma and daughter Bharati were also members.

There were a number of attacks on landlords, traders and police informers. Confiscation of properties, burning of loans statements and land pattas, confiscation of grains from traders, which they stole from the girijans, and distribution of the same to people - all these were activities of the party. Whether it is the incidents in the plains or incidents in Agency areas under the leadership of Vempatapu Satyam and Adibhatla Kailasam, they were not heroic acts of one or two people. They were retaliatory acts by hundreds and thousands of people and women participated in large numbers in such acts.

When the Andhra Pradesh special armed police entered and started burning villages and arresting people, the men were scared but the women protected the dalams. They would pretend that they are going for work and take food to squads. They would tie the food stuffs to their midriffs, pretend to be pregnant women and without knowledge of the military, they would hand over the food stuffs to squads. There are many revolutionary women who were caught by the police while taking food to squads, who were severely tortured and yet did not give away the whereabouts of the squads though they knew it. During the movement, thousands of women went to jails.

In many villages influenced by the movement, tribal women participated in all activities equally along with men. In many incidents in Agency areas, comrades Vempatapu Gunnamma, Chowdary Sampoornamma, Manemma and Vempatapu Bharati participated with courage.

Women who became martyrs in the movement:

- 1) Panchadi Nirmala: Comrade Nirmala was born in a poor family in Palakonda Taluka, Kavali village. With the help of her husband Pachandi Krishnamurthy she educated herself, improved her political consciousness and joined the movement leaving even her daughter and son behind. She was caught by the police on December 22nd, 1969 along with comrades Panigrahi, Ankamma, Saraswati and Niranjan Sahu and was killed by the police in Rangametiya mountains.
- 2) Telikala Saraswati: She was born in a poor agricultural family. She responded to the call of the movement and joined the organization founded by Panigrahi. At the age of 19, she was killed by the police along with Panigrahi and others.
- 3) Dunna Ankamma: She was born in a poor peasant's house in Rajam. She participated in women's organization's activities even before she joined the sqad. She left her husband and joined the movement and worked very actively. She was killed with Panigrahi and others in Rangametiya mountains.
 - 4) Biddika Sukku: She was killed in 1968 march.
- 5) Nimmaka Sukkulu: She was killed on March 24th, 1969 near Uridi by the police.
- 6) Kadraka Poorna: She was arrested and killed in Juruduguda near Kakili on june 5, 1969.
- 7) Savara Selji: She was arrested by the police in july 1969 near Mantikonda, was severely tortured and killed.
- 8) Mandangi Sayamma: She was arrested along with her husband in july 1969 and killed.
 - 9) Savara Sukku
- 10) Savara Sukkulu: She was arrested with three others near Antikonda and killed on August 5, 1969.
- 11) Biddika Chandramma: She was arrested near Kakili and killed in October 1969.
- 12) Arika Jayamma: She was killed along with her husband near Boddamanuguda on december 11, 1969.
 - 13) Arika Gaya: She was killed on december 11, 1969.
- 14) Biddika Suru: She was arrested along with her husband near Saki and killed on January 11, 1970.

- 15) Korangi Sundari: She was killed near Gadidapai in january 1970.
- 16) Pattika Sukku: She was arrested near Tadikonda and killed on April 6, 1971.

The details of another 9 women who became martyrs in Srikakulam movement are not yet known to us.

The women who are still continuing with different revolutionary parties

1) Paila Chandramma 2) Pothanapalli Jayamma 3) Pothanapalli Saramma (Chittakka)

Vengala Rao's Congress government dipped the Srikakula armed girijan and peasant movement in bloodshed. About 10,000 soldiers comprising of APSP, CRPF and others were sent to every hill and settlement to shoot at sight and to burn all villages. The atrocities these soldiers committed on women are beyond description. The government could suppress the movement but it did not solve the basic problems of people. The women who survived the violence unleashed by the government halted the struggle due to lack of leadership but they never compromised with the enemy nor do they think to this day that they should compromise. The proof for it is the fact that 27 years after Srikakulam struggle, these women have rejoined the revolutionary girijan women's organizations and are participating in the struggle. The old women are leading the women's organizations today. To this day there is class hatred in their words while describing their past. They still retain memories of the political goal of those days. They have the confidence that "in the past the fight under Alluri's leadership was defeated. Similarly, the struggle under comrade Vempatapu Satyam was defeated. Today we are waging the third war and we will definitely win it." One has to hear their words to learn the determination that people have about protecting their leadership and the hatred they have for police agents even if the agents are their relatives. The past struggle brought about cultural change in their traditions.

Women made some progress politically, culturally and economically in the Srikakulam struggle. The very women who used to run away as soon as they saw officers in any of the girijan villages are able to question the officers courageously and answer them defiantly today. Women are also playing a prominent part in holding the officers and project officers overseeing girijan projects accountable and in ensuring

that they build the checkdams, housing colonies and school buildings granted by the government as a part of improving the conditions of girijans. As an organized force they are able to control the exploitation of GCCs (such as incorrect weighing and lesser rates). They are solving a number of their problems through revolutionary girijan women's organizations. On the other hand the government established GCC and ITDA in the name of giving remunerative prices to girijans' products and these exploit the girjans more than the older traders. The 1/70 law which prohibits the transfer of girijan lands to non-girijans also came into existence because of the struggle of girijans. Even this wasn't applied to all girijan areas. The government, in collusion with landlords, declared a number of such areas as notified areas and subplan areas. The rulers ensured that land under subplan areas was not given to the girijans. The girijans are not getting the allowances or other facilities which are typically given to all employees in agency areas. Even to this day, the cheating by money lenders and traders is continuing. The government provided road and transport facilities to every village in the name of girijan development but did not bother to provide irrigation facilities for improvement of agriculture. As a nominal gesture a few checkdams and lakes have been constructed. The beneficiaries of even these have been the contractors and the girijans got nominal benefits out of these.

What did the people achieve through the Srikakulam struggle? They could obtain control over the forests again. They fought and took back the lands obtained by traders through cheating. They could abolish bonded labour (The landlord of Jumbiri which is near Neelakanthapuram used to transport his children and luggage to his relatives houses in Palakonda by making the girijans carry them without pay). They learnt through practice how weaker sections could unite to defeat stronger sections. More than anything else, they learnt that to obtain land, food and liberty, they have to fight not only the landlords and traders but also their faithful dogs - the police and the para military forces. They learnt that only by fighting all the above can they achieve their rule. The movement here had a setback because of the limited area in which it took place, because the leadership was all decimated due to severe repression, due to inexperience of the party, due to lack of correct estimation of tactics and due to some differences within the party.

The movement which was suppressed in Srikakulam exploded in 1978 in North Telangana as Jagityala victory march. As the movement

spread to other places in the state by building people's organizations, in Srikakulam too, programmes were started in 1983 towards the new democratic revolution. The main reason for not starting any programmes in Srikakulam once the movement was suppressed was the killing of leaders such as Satyam, Kailasam, Panigrahi, Krishnamurthy and others within a space of one year. The remaining leaders were mostly put in the jail and some of the leaders became rightists. Despite the number of governments that changed, the basic problems of people remained the same. The drinking water problem which was there from before the struggle, the exploitation by money lenders, the exploitation by GCC and ITDA officials, lack of remunerative prices for crops, the rising prices of essential commodities - all these remained the same. Under these conditions, struggles started again in the agency areas from the end of 1990.

The older area of struggle is now divided into Srikakulam and Vijayanagaram districts. Revolutionary girijan women's organizations have been formed in Srikakulam, Vijayanagaram, Ganjam, Gajapathi, Rayagadh and Koraput districts and they are taking up various struggles.

From 1983, people started addressing the problems of peasants and their basic necessities such as plots for housing and drinking water. In all these programmes, women participated equally with men, and there are some instances in which women showed more initiative.

Between 1983 and 1989, women participated with a great deal of enthusiasm in wage struggles to obtain fair wages in coconut and other plantations. Between 1987 and 1991, they participated in the struggle for reduction of liquor rates.

Wage Struggle:

In 1995, many women from Ratti and Bahadapalli villages of Mandasa mandal of Srikakulam district formed teams of 20 each. Of these, 5 teams participated in propaganda work for 10 days. As a result of this, they got the wages increased from Rs 15 to Rs 20. In 1989, when the forest department planted casuarina plants in the lands of fishermen belonging to Kothapeta, Komaralthada and Ramakrishnapuram villages of Vajrapu Kothuru mandal of Srikakulam district, they demanded and got the daily wages increased from Rs 5 to Rs 8. The village women's organization led this fight.

In 1989, women doing cement work in Akkupalli village of Srikakulam district got their wages increased from Rs 10 to Rs 15.

Women workers all across the division are demanding and obtaining wage rates equal to men. Women from Sullidi, Gotta, Sikhala and 25 other villages of Ramannaguda block in Orissa's Rayagadh district, who work in cotton and tobacco fields, fought under revolutionary gi ijan women's organization and got their daily wages increased from Rs 18 to Rs 25. Women from Mandasa mandal of Srikakulam district fought against the exploitation and violence of Mandasa's kings. They resolved problems between women under the leadership of women's organizations and ensured unity among working class women.

Liquor Struggle:

Women participated enthusiastically from 1984 to 1991 in the struggle for reduction of liquor rates. Women have been demanding from 1991 that liquor be completely prohibited. In 1992, when a liquor businessman tried to establish a liquor shop in Ratti village of Mandasa mandal of Srikakulam district, about 100 women from that village defied him. Even when the police came and threatened them, they stood against them with courage. In 1993, about 200 women from about 25 villages assembled in Koneluru village of Vajrapukothur mandal of Srikakulam and decided that they will establish women's organizations in every village and fight for total prohibition.

Women participated in demonstrations against liquor making in Batti Siripuram, Jeeba, Korsanda, Tulasipadu, Bollanda and other villages of Gusani block in Gajapati district of Orissa. Where the traders continued making liquor, they burnt the liquor shops. In 1995, in the villages of Ambugam and Limbugam in Mandasa mandal of Srikakulam, about 50 women warned the liquor contractors a number of times that they should not brew liquor. When the contractors did not pay heed, the women went in a procession and destroyed the liquor pots. When liquor contractor Ippili Chiranjeevi was selling liquor forcibly in Kothapeta village of Vajrapukothur mandal of Srikakulam, women burnt the liquor. The contractor then tried to beat up the youngsters with the help of goons but the women taught the goons also a lesson.

Land Struggle:

In 1991 June, about 2000 people participated in a struggle to allocate forest lands on the coastline to people living on the coast. This struggle took place in Mandasa and Vajrapukothur mandals of Srikakulam district and among the 2000 who participated, 500 were

women. In 1991 september, about 1000 people submitted a memorandum to the MRO of Palasa and Vajrapukothur that the lands on the coastline be given to the people who are tilling them. Among them 200 were women. In 1990-91, in the Narasannapeta area, about 5000 people belonging to Koiripeta, Kotharevu, Rajarampuram, Guppidipeta and Karipeta villages of Polaki mandal and also fishermen cut down the trees in forest areas. They sold lorries of wood and occupied the lands. About 1000 women participated in this struggle. In 1993, about 45 families in Thatimanuguda village of Bhamini mandal in Srikakulam fought and occupied 7 acres of land. In that struggle, about 150 women participated along with men. The temple lands of agency villages Kothur, Singipuram, Sabakota and 20 others in Mandasa mandal of Srikakulam used to be under the control of landlords. About 500 people took out a procession under the leadership of Adivasi peasant and workers union and confiscated about 100 acres of temple lands. They also demanded that they be given pattas for those lands. About 150 women participated in this event. In 1990, there was a struggle for ownership of nut kernels in the forest lands of Palasa and Mandasa mandals. About 1000 people from the villages of Ratti, Bhethalapuram, Boddapadu and 25 other villages participated in this of which 300 were women. Though the contractors were warned not to bid for the contracts, they picked up the nuts under police protection. This program for control of seeds took place every year from 1990-94. About 500 acres of land in Rattikonda were distributed among landless people.

Repression - Resistance:

Koormi Naidu, the landlord of Jeerupalem Jagannadhapuram village of Ranasthalam mandal of Srikakulam district (he is the brother of Gorle Sriramulu Naidu) had been exploiting the fisher folks living along the coast economically, politically and sexually for almost 15 years. To stop his exploitation and cruelty, people organized themselves as Fisheries industries union and questioned him. The union dragged Koormi Naidu to the people of the village and demanded that the lands that he took forcibly away from people should be distributed among the poor, the thousands of rupees he illegally collected should be given back to the people and that he should tender a public apology for insulting women. About two thousand women participated in this programme.

In 1990, when the police arrested the leaders of Fisheries industries union belonging to Narasannapeta and Polaki mandals of

Srikakulam, about 200 women attacked the police station as a protest against the arrest and called for the release of their leaders and also for condemnation of Narasannapeta SI's violence. They got their leaders released by their action.

In 1993, when the police arrested 10 activists belonging to Youth federation of Limbugam village of Mandasa mandal in Srikakulam, 30 women protested their arrest and demanded that they be released. They stayed put in the police station premises for about a week. The police finally got frustrated and let off the 10 activists.

In Ratti village of Mandasa mandal in Srikakulam, ten leaders of Youth federation had to go around stealthily as the repression of the enemy increased. To force them to surrender, the Mandasa police arrested five women who were their relatives, put them in the lockup for a week and abused and insulted them. Despite that the leaders did not surrender and the police had no choice but to let the women go.

The police repeatedly arrested Comrade Kamulakka of Nalla Bodduluru village of Mandasa mandal in Srikakulam for her active role in revolutionary programmes. They arrested her many times from 1988 till now and each time they arrested her, they put her in the lockup for days on end, threatened her to distance herself from party's activities, tortured her in many ways and subjected her to mental agony. Despite all that, she stood strongly against the enemy.

Whenever any incident happened anywhere in Srikakulam district, the police arrested women of Bahadapalli, Limbugam, Ratti and other villages tens of times and tortured them. Despite that, the women continued their activities in women's organizations with determination.

The fisher folks belonging to Kothapeta village of Vajrapukothur mandal of Srikakulam burnt a hutment belonging to the forest department in protest against the government utilizing all the space for plantation of casuarina plants without leaving any space for them to dry out their boats and fishing nets. Women played a prominent part in this. In retaliation to this, when the police came to arrest the district level leader of Fisheries industries union, about 200 women formed a barricade in front of the police and their jeeps and stopped them from arresting their leader.

People's Courts:

In 1990s, in Bahadapalli village of Mandasa mandal in Srikakulam district, the landlord Mabidi Madhavarao, Krishna Rao, Pedda Venkadu

and other goondas and landlords had been harassing, torturing and exploiting people for many years. This landlord's goondas had tortured and killed an activist by name Bogarao. They also tortured women's activist comrade Kamulakka in many ways for cooperating with the party. They forcibly took away cooking utensils and materials from 20 households in Bahadapalli village. A people's court was held on all such atrocities under the leadership of youth federation for about 30 hours with the participation of around 1000 people. The landlords and their goondas were the accused in this court. Starting with the enumeration of violence and exploitation unleashed by the landlords to the conclusion of the court's session, about 200 women participated courageously in this court.

Against atrocities:

In 1993, in Dunnuru village of Mandasa mandal in Srikakulam, a man deceived a woman after promising to marry her. On this incident, the women in the village came together and in may 1995, they imposed a penalty on that man. They made him give 40 cents of land and a house to the woman who was deceived.

In Ranasthalam mandal of Srikakulam district, the Congress leader and landlord Gorle Sriramulu Naidu usurped the lands of fisher folk, used them for 500 acres of coconut plantations and became a big landlord. When the people unionized themselves under Fisheries industries union and questioned his violence and exploitation, as a retaliation to that he came with his goondas to Jeerupalem and Jagannadhapuram villages and burnt them down. He deliberately burnt a woman named Seethamma in the fires. In protest against that, the fishermen all over the district united and went in a procession to the Collector's office and submitted a memorandum. About 5000 people participated in this event which took place in june 1990. Of them, more than 1000 were women.

In 1989 october, police arrested the fishermen of Echerla and Ranasthalam mandals and their leaders (Lakshmaiah, Durvasu) for fighting against the cruel landlord Gorle Sriramulu Naidu. In protest against this illegal arrest, 4000 people staged a dharna near the Srikakulam collectorate and demanded that their leaders should be released. As a result of that, the leaders were released on bail. About 500 women participated in this event.

On September 18, 1995, a 45 ft martyrs memorial for Koranna and Manganna was built in Levidi village (of Kurupam and Gumma Lakshmipuram mandal in Vijayanagaram district) at the place where they became martyrs. Thousands of girijan peasants participated in the construction of that memorial. Among the 1000 people who built the memorial, 200 were women. They helped in the construction work by giving sticks and by preparing rice and vegetables for meals. Even in making the procession and meeting for the inauguration of the memorial a success, about 3000 women participated without fearing repression. A total of 15000 people attended the meeting.

On July 8, 1996 a procession was taken out regarding peasants' problems from Kooneru in Vijayanagaram district to mandal headquarters Komarada which is 8 km away. Two thousand people participated in the procession of which 100 were women. Six women formed a team and toured 13 villages in two days asking people to come for the procession.

In 1991 January, a state wide bandh was conducted against increasing prices and repression. In that context, thousands of people participated in protest programmes and organized "Rasta Roko". About 200 women participated in these programmes.

On March 8, 1991, in view of International Women's Day, about 100 women attended the meeting in Pundi in Srikakulam district. Similarly, a meeting was conducted for International Women's day in Boddapadu village of Palasa mandal with 600 participants.

Orissa:

The peasants of Gusani block in Gajapati district were inspired by the peasants struggles in Srikakulam district and started organizing themselves from 1993 onwards. People from the extremely backward state of Orissa are economically and politically much behind others. Gajapati district is a direct example of that. A meeting was held on peasants problems in Parlakimidi, the district headquarters of Gajapati.

On July 28, 1995 a procession and a public meeting were held with 10,000 people of which 500 were women. On September 10, 1995 a meeting was held in Thotagummada of Gusani block in Ganjam district on peasants problems. About 5000 people attended the meeting out of which 1500 were women. On March 8, 1995, on the International Women's day, a meeting was held with 400 women in Akkupalli village. Women from 40 villages attended as representatives.

On December 22, 1990, on Comrade Subbarao Panigrahi's death anniversary, a meeting was conducted near Kalingadal dam in Mandasa mandal of Srikakulam to inaugurate the martyrs memorial. About 4000 people attended the meeting despite enemy's repression. Out of them 500 were women. The police machinery tried to disrupt the meeting by stopping people from coming and by hitting the people they could lay their hands on. Despite that, the above number of people managed to escape the police and attended the meeting.

In March 1990, Comrade Bogarao's memorial was inaugurated in Bahadapalli village of Mandasa mandal. Fifteen hundred people attended the inauguration out of which 300 were women. In Bhamini mandal of Srikakulam, Revolutionary Girijan Women's Organization representing about 15 villages and with a membership of 2000 was formed in march 1995. In Jeerupalem village of Ranasthalam mandal in Srikakulam, a procession and meeting were conducted in 1990 on the occassion of Bhagat Singh's death anniversary. Thousand people participated in this of which about 250 were women.

Revolutionary girijan women's organization has been conducting classes for its activists regarding women's problems, state of the society and the necessity of new democratic revolution. These classes have been useful in giving clarity and understanding to activists that women's liberation will happen as part of the liberation of society as a whole.

On International Women's day in march 1995, a meeting was held in Bhamini mandal headquarters for which 2000 women attended. In 1996 may, girijan women belonging to Bendakayalapeta and Mukhalingapuram villages of Tekkali mandal in Srikakulam district formed revolutionary women's organizations and actively participated in land struggles. One hundred and sixty nine acres of land belonging to girijans had been forcibly taken away from them and given to Radhakrishna Math. Women stood along side men with courage to get back that land. They withstood the police repression and got back their land.

In Gumma Lakshmipuram, Kurupam, Komarada and other mandals of Vijayanagaram, in Mandasa, Vajrapukothur, Bhamini, Seethampeta, Palakonda and other mandals of Srikakulam, the women formed mandal level women's organizations and have been fighting against liquor, patriarchal thought process and dowry problems. In the fight for liberation of workers, women have been fighting shoulder to shoulder along with men.

Women, who in 1993 were frightened to respond, who did not step outside, who were scared to cross the limits imposed by their husbands and in-laws are today increasing their consciousness to solve their own problems. They are forming village level organizations at economic and political levels and are conducting propaganda campaigns. They are dragging men who are wife beaters into the public, acting as elders and are giving just decisions. They are punishing those who are committing atrocities on women. In wage and land struggles, in facing the attacks and repression of landlords, their goondas and the police, women are playing their half of the role with courage and boldness.

In this way, step by step, the women's movement is spreading in Srikakulam, Vijayanagaram, Ganjam, Gajapati, Rayagadh and Koraput districts.

Women today are mobilising against the various problems they face as girijans, agricultural workers and as women. Wherever there is a struggle, women are participating in hundreds and thousands. They are dedicating themselves full time for the new democratic revolution. In this way, they are re-igniting the flames of older Srikakulam struggle. They are following in the footsteps of the martyrs of Srikakulam struggle and are once again giving inspiration to the exploited people and women all: over India.

Working class women: Making the invisible visible the task before the revolutionary women's movement

-Stree Chetana, Nagpur

All over the world the participation of women in working class struggles has gone up. Since the percentage of women workers is going up, they are becoming an increasingly important component of the working class. International capitalism has intensified its use of patriarchy to exploit women not only in their own countries but in third world countries too. As working class struggles get intensified the role of working women in these struggles will also become important. The women proletariat must play its historical role to liberate themselves from the chains of imperialism and bureaucrat capitalism and gender based exploitation as well.

But India, since the vast majority of toiling women are in the rural areas, it is the contribution of peasant and tribal women that has been and will be most significant in the struggle to bring an end to feudal, capitalist exploitation and patriarchal oppression. Yet there are very large numbers of women who live by their toil, outside the sphere of agriculture. By their sheer numbers they constitute a force which is yet to be organised and released. The length and depth of feudal tradition in India has kept the masses of poor women in chains of bondage and without self worth. They toil and they labour but are hardly recognised. The composition of working women in India varies form that of other countries, including other Asian countries, women constitute 40 to 50 % of the labour force in countries like Germany and Norway. They constitute a little more than a quarter in India. While industry employs hardly 7.5% of India's working women, even in countries like Korea, Malaysia and Singapore women were almost half the work force in manufacture. In Indonesia 12% and Philippines 17% of women's labour force were in industry. And in India most of the non-agricultural women's labour force is in the informal sector.

The invisibility of women's works its under-valuation and perception that it is a "secondary" line of operation is sharply evident in the industrial sector. indeed it is a matter of serious concern for all of us who are concerned with women's liberation and revolution, the working class women and their contribution to the working class movement is so neglected while the resurgence of the women's movement in the late 1970s, and the consequent growth in women studies, helped to focus studies on the "invisible" women due to the existing ruling class policies. But her contribution to struggles is still mostly hidden in the yellowed, brittle pages of political journals and magazines, scattered in the jhuggies and bastis of workers around the country. The task of making her contribution to the trade union movement and to the broader working class movement. "Visible" has only now begun. This paper is an attempt to understand why this is.

This paper first deals with the colonial period, tracing the entry of women into the modern working class and her struggles. In the next section it deals with the broad changing trends in women's employment especially in the post 1947 considering the reasons for these changes. The paper also covers the impact of protective legislation, the role of trade unions and the struggles women have undertaken. Finally, we have taken up various issues that have come up in the context of the working class movement, that the women's movement should also consider.

I.Women in the Working class - History and Trends Colonial period-

Destruction of handicraft Industry:

In 1834-35 Marx wrote, "The misery hardly finds parallel in the history of commerce. The bones of the cotton weavers are bleaching the plains of India."

An important proportion of the cotton weavers and spinners of yarn in pre-colonial India were woman and they too were victims of the colonial policy that destroyed the widespread handicraft industry in the country. This destruction of the handicraft industry severely affected women's role in production. In the pre-capitalist economy, the family was the unit of production both in agricultural and in artisan households and women contributed considerably to the productive activity in artisan households too, though their role and responsibility varied in the different regions. In many areas they marketed what their families produced too.

"The decline in women's employment was apart of the general process of loss of industrial employment that affected the entire Indian Population during the 19th and early 20th century. The once flourishing cottage industries in India suffered a severe setback "due to the rapacious exploitation by the East India Company, the tariff barriers introduced to protect British factory manufactured goods and the competition from imported and mill made yarn. The decline of textiles, metal products, and services by potters and blacksmiths affected women's industrial employment adversely.

The burden of the population shifted towards agriculture and the proportion of women dependent on agriculture for their subsistence increased. Table-1. The increased burden on agriculture meant underemployment and impoverishment. Women migrated with men where they found work opportunities. They migrated as indentured labour to other British colonies in Africa and Pacific islands. Modern industry started merging in the second half of the 19th century itself. But the slow pace of industrialistion meant that the absolute number and proportion of the female population that got employment in these industries was too small to arrest the decline in the participation of women in non-agricultural occupations.

Growth of modern industry

In the first phase of the growth of modern industry many women (and children) were employed in the manual and semi-manual operations in textile mills, jute mills, in mines. They were also employed in large numbers in tea and later coffee plantations started by British and Indian capitalists. Thus women joined the ranks of the modern proletariat from he second half of the 19th century. IN the colonial period women constituted an important portion of the working class. In the 1920s for example, women constituted 20% of the total workers in the textile industry. They were also employed in large numbers in the cotton pressing and ginning industries. In Great Bombay alone, out of a total factory employment of 2.10 lakhs in 1927, approximate 40,000 were women. Large number of women were also employed in mines. In 1901 itself 30,488 women were working in mines. In 1921, 38 percent of the mine workers were women. In 1951, 1.09 lakh women were employed in mines and they comprised about one-fifth of the total work force in mines.

Women worked as loaders in the coal mines, and as cleaners and sorters in manganese mines. Though the largest number of women were employed in coal mines, their proportion in manganese and iron ores (43.9% and 38.2%) was higher. Similarly women constituted a large proportion of the workers in teas and coffee plantations both in Assam and South India. They constituted over 45 percent of the plantation labour, and several lakh women were employed in these plantations.

Besides, in urban areas women began to be employed in municipalities as scavengers and sweepers, in the railways. Thus, though the total proportion of female employment industry was low, yet, women constituted an important and militant section of the modern working class in the colonial period.

Post 1947 Period -

Rapid decline in womens' Work Participation:

In this period employment in the organised sector expanded and diversified as new industries started coming up. But in this period the proportion of women's employment started falling and there was a decline in women's total employment till 1971. It is in the decade of the 1980s that womens' participation in non-household industry and in the service sect or has increased. (See table II).

One of the most important reasons for this decline in women's employment in industry is the rapid decline in the handicraft industry after 1947. The expansion of the agro-processing factories affected women in the traditions industries like oil pressing, rice pounding, tanning and leather products, tobacco processing. Since the largest proportion of women in the non-agricultural occupations were in the domestic, cottage industry, the decline in this industry affected women's employment. The growth of organised markets and big intermediaries affected women who marketed products of household industry. Hence women's employment in the service sector also declined.

The second reason for the decline in women's employment was the retrenchment of large number of women workers from the modern industrial sector. Though it is in the British period itself that the process of redusing women in the factories and mines began, it became more rapid after 1950. Women began to be retrenched due to following reasons.

- 1. Mechanisation, Automation and Rationalisation has affected women workers most of all women's lack of education, the lack of opportunities to learn new technical skills, means that they were the first to be thrown out when manual or semi-manual operations were automised, e.g. the introduction of high speed spinning and winding machines led to women being retrenched. Even in modern industries like pharmaceuticals, new superfast filling, sealing and labelling machines meanst recruitment of women was curtailed. The same process has been repeated in the jute industry, in the coir and tobacco process industries too. As a result, the tot al number of women employed in factories declined in the 1 960s.
- 2. Protective Legislation: Though the trade union movement demanded and got laws passed that protected women yet it did nothing to stop the retrenchment of women due to these very laws. The various protective legislations were used by employers to stop the recruitment of women initially and then directly retrench them. E.g. with the ban on night shift employment for women, women began to replaced by men in the textile industry. The ban on employing women in underground work in mines, the 1954 award equalising the wages of women and men workers, the restrictions on how much load a woman can carry affected women in the mines. In the jute industry too the restrictions on load affected women's employment. To circumvent the other facilities etc, employers stoped recuiting women or restricted the number of women to be employed. In the case of the bidi industry they shift ed operations from the factory/workshop to the home. The bidi rolling industry is probably one of the first industries in which the shift from the organised to the unorganised, domestic sector took place.

The fact is that capitalists have spent very little on the benefits and facilties that have to be provided to women. They have ignored, circumvented these laws and yet they have ret renched women and curtailed their recruitment in the name of these laws.

The failures of the trade union movement to prevent the retrenchment of women due to a bove two reasons is in the fact the most important cause for the decline of women in m odern industry, the marginalisation of women from the industrial sector in the post 1947 period. Thus from being an import ant component of the proletariat in the colonial p eriod women became a marginal force in the modern manufacturing industries. They remained concentrated in the traditions, declining industries. In the cities, domestic service became the an important source of employment for women. (Table III).

Present situation-

Impact of Globalisation and SAP:

women's employment has been affe cted by the world wide imperialist offensive since late 70s and the pro-imperialist structural adjustment policies introduced by the Indian Government. On the other hand there has been further retrenched from industries and on the other hand there has been expansion of export oriented production, esp in the unorganised sector that is employing large numbers of women.

Hence there has been a growth in the proportion of women employed in the non-household manufacturing sector in the 1980s. (See Table II).

In the first period after the comprador bourgeoisie came to power in India, while the organised sector expanded, women were marginalised, but in the present period the organised manufacturing sector itself is under attack. The closure of thousands of factories, both in the public and private sectors in the decade of the 1980s has thrown lakhs of workers, including women workers out of jobs. In many cases they has lost their life long savings and dues. Thousands of workers have been either forcibly retrenched or have been forced to giveup their jobs through ploys like the VRS (Voluntary Retirement Scheme). Women have been targetted for this too. The Hindustan Levers case is a typical example of how this policy is being pursued by aggressive MNCs. Women's employment in the Sewree plant in Mumbai has been curtailed over the years. As part of their restructuring operations in the early 80s they targetted women. During the year long lock-out they approached and forced women to accept the VRS and finally when the plant reopened only seven women workers remained in the plant; 150 women had accepted VRS.

The policy of liberalisation means that more and more jobs even in big factories and offices are bein given out on contract and subcontract basis. Women are being employed in the lowest levels in these contract jobs, as temporary, casual workers. The growth of the export oriented industries like garment and electronics and the setting up of export promotion zones has led to the employment of larger and larger number of women, especially school educated girls in these factories. They are forced to work for low wages, there is an informal ban on unionisation in these zones. Many of these industries are sub-contrac-

tors for the imperialist companies, a part of their international division of labour. Globalisation the international division of labour introduced by the imperialists, means that these industries and contracts are completely dependent on the imperialists for their market and subject to their rapacity and exploitation. The burden of this exploitation is being borne by these workers.

Globalisaton has also meant the decentralisation of production prod uction being shifted out of large factories into workshops and h omes. With computer based technology they have combined a highly centralised group of highly skilled workers with a large number of de-skilled, dispersed labour processes which require little capital investment. Thus these nodules of parts of the production process itself are thus being contracted out to small units where the same product is manufactured under very different conditions of work. It is in these sweated workshops that large numbers of women are being employed in larger cities. The imperialists have also introduced the putting out system once again, highly divided parts of the production process are being given out to women to produce at home. Women with the help of their children work for long hours for a mere pittance. The wage is not even a subsistence wage enough for mere survival. Thousands of women in the vast slums of Mumbai for example involved in sewing garments from their home, in manufacturing parts of jewellery, locks, clips, bindis, paper boxes, agarbathis etc. They work with no tools or with the simplest. They now constitute the new unorganised sector, home based workers being created by the SAP, women, who do not even realise that they are workers.

Women, especially third world women are being considered as particularly suitable for this task, they constitute a cheap, decile labour force, which is willing to work long hours for extremely depressed wages. Since their work is considered as supplementary, and since they combine it with domestic responsibilities, it fits into the feudal patriar-chal family norms. The imperialists are using the feudal patriarhal norms to extract labour with superprofits from the third world women, especially in the home-based sector.

The main critieria for locating production in a particular places is the availability of cheap labour, so the productin can be shifted the moment cheaper labour is vailable elsewhere. The fact that this kind of production, whet her in workshops or at home has the minimal of machinery, closing the shifting production is extremely simple and entils no cost whatsoever. Thus women are being given work, with no certainity of continuity of job security.

Growth of service sector:

At the same time women's employment in the service sector, in teaching jobs, as nurses and para-medical workers in the rural health schemes, in the ICDS project, as clerks in the banking insurance and government administration and the telecommunications has also grown in the past two decades. By 1984-85, 12.9 percent of working women were employed in the organised sector, of which the service sector itself accounted for 9.26 percent. This is a well unionised sec tor. This sector too has been effected by the liberalisation and privatisation policies of the government, the reduction in government spending on education and h ealth, by computerisation etc. To prot ect their jobs and improve their serv ice conditions, workers in this sector have taken up struggles, in which these women have also activily participated. The number of educated unemployed women is growing by leaps and bounds.

Thus in this past two decades, the number and proport ion of women in m anufacturing has gone up, though they are concentrated in the unorganised sector. At the same time the number of educated women finding employment in the service sec tor has become substantial, and they are concentrated in cer tain industries and occupations in the service sector. Women's role in the working class movement has once again become imortant.

Gender based discrimination:

Yet women in both the organised and unorganised sec tor are subject to exploitation on a gender basis as well.

- 1. Women are concentrated in the unorganised sector. The largest proportion of women are bidi workers, handloom weavers, fish processing workers, vendors, manthadi (headload carriers) workers, domestic serv ants. Wages are low, hours of work unregulated and they hve no job security or benefits. They have no chances of promotion work experience does not bring them bet ter wages.
- 2. Feminisation of certain occupations. Women are concentrated in certain low skill, low wage occupations. Their work is under-valued and wage rates are lower, e.g. coir industry, bidi industry domestic

- service, hand embroidery, nursing, primary school teaching are examples of female dominated occupations.
- 3. Bias against women: Women are not allowed to handle sophisticated machinery and insruments because it is assumed that they cannnot learn the nessary skills and technical knowledge. They are concentrated in industries with less capital investment (SeeTable V).

This is being reinforced by the policy of the Government and social attituted since girls are not educated as compared to boys, and also technical institutes offer very few courses for girls and women. Most of the courses offered are those li ke stenotyping, data operating, cookery, beautician courses, which are considered suitabel for women.

- 4. Wages discrimination: Inspite of legislations like equal renumeration act women get lower wages than men in many indusries and jobs. Women earn less than men even in the same job. Often unions too sigh agreements that accept lower rat es for women. Various indirect methods are also used to keep their wages lower like keeping them p iece rated, casual or temporary, lowering the categorisation of their work.
- 5. Women employees and workers have to face sexual harrassement from superivisors, seniors.
- 6. Discrimination: Pregnancy and motherhood, the social functions of women have become levers in the hands of the comprador-feudal government and private capitalists to harrass and discriminate against women. While the concept of paternity leave has been accepted in developed countries, in India women are still struggling to asser t their right to motherhood. Pregnancy women are not employed, they are retrenched during pregnancy.

The Government has also tries to link meternity benefits to marital st atus. This came to light in 1986 when a telephone operator from Bhuj was denied meternity leave because she was not married on the records of the department. Protests all over the country and a legal battle finally succeeded in forcing the Government to withdraw its stand. The Government in typical feudal fashion that the provision is meant to protect the health of the mother and child. It was also an attempt to force women to change their surnames after marriage.

The fourth pay commission has also restricted the right by proposing the maternity benefits should be claimed only upto two births. Even the ESI Act has been amended so that this right is d enied to a large number of contract and casual workers.

- 7. Health Hazards: Many of the occupations in which women are employed are hazardous to health. Lack of information and lack of alternative employment forces women to continue in these occupations.
- 8. Lack of facilities like separate tolets, restrooms: This problem eXists both in the organised and in the unorganised sector. Utter neglect of the special needs of women, lack of t rained staff to handle children in creches, these problems are lowest on the priority of trade unions and hence neglected.

II. Struggles of women Workers

British period:

The first part of the 20th century marked by the awakening of the p roletaria t, especiall in the period after the first world war. The severe exploitation of the workers during the war years due to which the capitalist amassed massive profits, coupled with the growth of an anti-imperialist consciousness led to a wave of workers' struggles. Trade unions began to be formed in this period. Women workers, who formed a significant section of the young proletariat played an active part in these struggles. They constituted a militant section of the working class in the colonial period, in the textile, jute and plantations and mines industries.

In the textile industry too women were active from the very inception. They faced sever e, inhuman exploitation. Long working hours without any limits, without adequate break, poor working conditions, and wages almost half that of men. No provision for maternit et c. Due to this women textile workers were active from the social reform period in the end of the 19th century. In Mumbai, when a social reform N.M. Lokhande began the Millhands Association in 1890 women workers also joined the association, att ending and even addressing meetings of the association. The campaign of the textile workers of Bombay had its impact in getting the Factory Commission appointed in September 1890. Following the recommendations of the Factory Commission the second restricted working houurs of women to 11 hours and prohibited night work for women.

Later when the t rade union movement emerged among textile workers women workers were also active and militant fighters. In the famous long strike in 1928 women were in the forefront of the picketing at mill gates. Women workers and wives of men workers played an active role in the Sholapur uprising in May 1930. Tex tile workers had gone on strike to protest against the arrest of Gandhi during the Civil Disobedience Movement. In retaliation against police firing on the striking workers, they workers burnt down police stations and the district court complex. The striking workers, joined by the general public, took control of the town. The British took seven days to regain control of the town. They declared martial law and unleashed a very brutal campaign of repression. Working class women displayed exemplary courages in this uprising. Through their struggles, women textile workers in Bombay were able to prevent their retrenchment in the 1930s.

The international socialist women's movement and the Third International led by Lenin raised sev er al demands to protect women workers and to provide for their special needs. Ban on night work, ban on work in industries of processes hazar dous to health, mat ernity leave, creches, separate toilet facilities, communit kitchens regular breaks for feeding babies these demands raised by the international socialist movement, and implemented by the Bolsheviks after the Russian Revolution in the USSR. These because the demands of the international working class. Though the all Indian trade Union movement too raised these demands, during the colonial period only the ban on night work and underground work was legally enforced by the colonial British Government. That too partiall, for during the se cond world war, die to the needs of increasing production of coal, women were encoraged and made to work in the underground mines. It is only in the period after 1947 that the trade union movement succeeded in getting legislation enacted for equal wag es, materrnity benefits, creche facilities.

The trade union movement emerged in the 1920s in the context of the anti-British movement. The mass of workers and peasants also beg an to participate in the movement. Hence many of the petti-bouurgeois and bourgeois leaders and participants of the nationalist struggles kept links with workers' movement and some of them Marxist leaders became organisers and supporters of the trade union movement. It is in this context that Annie Besant was elected one of the three Vice-Presidents of the AITUC at its founding conference in 1919.

Many educat ed, middle class women worked tireessly among the workers as organisers and came to be recognised as leaders of the workers. In the Bombay Province, Maniben Kara, a support er of M.N. Roy, led the struggles of textile workers. A fiery orator she was in prisoned for her speeches. Elected as the President of the AITUC in 1935 she remained active among workers all her life. Ushatai Dange, the wife of the CPI leader S.A. Dange, was active among women tex tile workers from the 1928 strike itself. She led the eight month long strggle of the British mill workers, against re trenchment. The high point of their struggle was the night long encirlement of the mill office by over seven hundred women workers. Usha Dange was also one of the organisers of the 1934 strike and remained associated with the workers movement all her li fe. Parbati Bhore, a barber by caste was a fiery speaker and participated in many struggles of textile workers. She was elected Joint Secretary of the Girni Kamgar Union. Meenakshi Sane, a member of the CPI, was sent to Sholapur by the party in 1934 to work among the workers who had earned a named through their militancy. She built up a st ruggle movement among textile and bidi workers with women p layed a leading role. Shanta Bhalerao, a fullt imer of t he AITUC was elected Vice-President of the AITUC. Noteworthy about these women was the fact that most of them remained active trade unionists all their life.

In February 1946, during the militant general strikes in support of the Royal Indian Navy cadet uprising, almost five hundred workers in Bombay were killed in police firings. Among these martyrs was one women communist leader, Kamal Dande.

In Bengal too several women, especially nationalist leaders became leaders of the trade union movement. Among them was Santosh Kumari Devi who led the jute workers from 1922-27 in the Gouripurnaihiti region of the 24 parganas, Dr. PraBhabati Dasgupta, who led the struggle of the scavengers of Calcutta Municipal Corporation in 1928 and then the general strike of jute workers in 1929, Dr. Maitreyi Bose, a Congress women, worked among dock and port workers. She joined the INTUC and was a prominent leader of the INTUC, a r are thing considering that the INTUC has no tradition at all of promoting women into leadership. Communist women of various trends too were active among workers. Sudha Roy a communist school teacher worked among dock workers in 1930s. Women workers in jute mills, in the plantations too made a name for themself as militant organisers. Dukmat was active among the jute workers of the Baranagar area and led many mili-

tant agitations. She was a representative of the workers in AITUC and elected Vice President of the Jute workers Union, Sukumari Chaudhari was an active worker of Bengal Lamps, Maili Chetri a tea garden worker led and organised the Denguajhaar tea garden in a long drawn struggle in the repressive period of the late 1940s. She went underground though she was pregnant and led the striking workers from jungles. Succumbing to the extreme physical hardship she died in 1949. There are many such unsung heroines of the working class movement. There are few examples are given to stress the point that women as workers and as political active members of the anti - imperialist movement and the communist movement played as active role in the working class movement. But this history is hidden in the various specific struggles and these could not be comprehensively documented for this paper. The average book on trade union history does not display any gender sensitivity and does not dwelve into this aspect of the working class movement. To an extent this is also a reflection of the weakness of the trade union movement itself which drew women into struggle, raised their demands, but did not conceptualise the significance of the women's participation in modern industry, the problem of the double burden and thereby devise strategies to counter the anti woman maneouvers of the capitalist class.

Post 1947 Struggles involving women workers:

This period too is marked initially by the major struggles in industries where women constitute a substantial manner. Organisations of bidi workers were active during the British period itself, but their struggles picked up momentum in the 1950s and 1960s especially in Maharashtra, Karnataka, Kerala and later in Andhra Pradesh coir workers in Kerala also led some militant struggles in the 1950s. They have also struggled against attempts to mechanise their work. In the 1970s and 1980s casual and contract workers in the public sector steel and heavy engineering plants and mines around the country have started getting organised and participated in the militant struggles to get maximum wages, for regularisation, implementation of provissions like PF, gratuity, bonus etc. Women contract and casual workers have been very much part of these struggles. It was due to the agitations of bidi workers that the Bidi and Cigar (conditions of Employment) Act of 1966 was enacted. This Act provides for paid weekly holiday, annual leave, maternity benefits to all the workers including home based workers,

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Many of these struggles have been subject to severe police repression but both women workers and the wives of striking workers have braved brutal repression to continue the struggle. The wives of railway workers braved repression to sit on the rail tracks to prevent the para military from running trains during the famous all India railway strike in May 1974. The workers in the iron ore mines of Dalli Rajhara began their attempts to form a separate union by facing police firing in 1977. The women textile workers and women family members of the striking workers participated in the rasta roko and jail bharo during the longest textile strike in Mumbai in 1982. One woman was martyred in this jail bharo. Women workers from SEEPZ in Bombay faced detention in jail when they militantly gheraoed a minister in his bunglow. Such accounts are innumerable and go to show that women workers are still as militant and willing to face the most brutal repression in order to fight their exploitation and get justice.

Since the late 1970s organisations of workers and employees in the various service sector industries has also started growing. School and college teachers, nurses, government employees etc have been involved in struggle. The militancy of women school teahers during the state wide strike in Tamilnadu made news all over the county. It is women in this sector who have struggled, individually and collectively against discriminatory practices and sexual harassment, the struggle of air hostess against being permanently grounded on attaining the age of 30 yrs or on becoming pregnant, the struggle of nursing students in Raipur and other cities against the virginity tests are examples of these struggles. Women employees in the anganwadis under the ICDS scheme have got unionised and have put up state wide and even an All India agitaion to get regularised and get a regular salary instead of the miserable wage they were being given.

In the unorganised sector too women have slowly started organising themselves. The widespread organisation of the tendu leaf pickers in the forests of Cental India under the leadership o' he DAKMS and KAMS in the past decade and a half has suceeded in substantially increasing the wages of the workers. Women and man baboo workers (burad) in Bhandara district have also faced police repression to demand regular supply of bamboo at low rates from the forest department. Among the reformsit attempts to organise women in the self employed sector the most famous is SEWA started by Ila Bhatt in Ahmedabad. Starting as a union of headload workers it has grown in to an institution

providing credit, medical training etc. Yet the vast mass of women in unorganised are yet to be organised.

While women have been militant and consistant during struggle their participation in regular trade union activites and in taking leadership in trade union is low (see table iv). Some unions women have functioned as unit leaders, or have become members of local committees, but few are found in responsible positions at the higher level. The neglect of the special problems of women by trade unions remains the single most important reason for this.

The tradition of women trade unions still continues in Maharashtra even upto the present period. Most of them have been middle class women working among the unorgainsed sections of the workers. The oldest among them at present is Sunder Navalkar. A labour lawyer, she was arrested in the early 70s for her association with the ML movement and sentenced for 3 years. She was worked among construction workers all her life.

III) Role of Trade Unions and Communist movement

The trade union movement in India has to take the prime responsibility for the dismal condition of women workers in the industrial sector, their marginalisation and their concentration in the low paid, insecure informal sector, their low participation in trade union activities and meetings.

While the trade union movement is splintered on the basis of alignment to the various ruling class parties, the communist movement has had an important impact on the trade union movement. The CPI worked hard and built up militant struggles of workers and built up unions of workers in all major industries at that time. The working class also played an active role in the anti imperialist struggle, but the weakness in the political line of the party at that time prevented the proletariot from taking the leadership of the anti imperialist movement. The weakness of the political and organisational line of the CPI had its bearing on the quesions of women's oppression too.

Inspite of leading women workers in bitter struggle and even building up leadership among women the CPI did not pay serious attention to the quesion of womens participation in modern industrial production. It did not conceptualise the gender bias that operated in industry, the ways in which the imperialists and the local candidates are using patriarchial

norms in order to keep women's labour value depressed and hence they did not devise steps to counter these strategies of the capitalists and the British rulers. Organisationally too no specific steps were taken to create organisational forms through which women workers could be given special attention. During the course of the Russian revolution the Bolsheviks used many organisational forms, like sub committees, bureau etc for organising women workers. Though in the late 1920 s Dange, the leader of the CPI and the textile movement in Bombay, mooted the idea of of separate cellls for women workers, but there is no evidence of concrete steps taken to form such groups on a systematic basis. Fifty years later, in 1987, A.B. Bardhan, the Ge. Secretary of AITUC and presently Secretary of the CPI wrote, "There is only a sprinkling of women delegates in TU conference at various levels. Even where women workers are overwhelming numbers, as for the example in bidi or coir industry, it is men who represent them as delegates at conference. Executive committees and office bearers of TU rarely have women among them." It is an admission of the fact that they failed to involve women workers.

Inspite of the many weaknesses in political and organisational line, yet in the British reriod much work was done among women workers. But t he major change came in the political line of the party af ter 1950. The CPI upheld the so-clled independence of India, hailed the rule of the comprador feudal classes and the rule of the anti-imperialist national bourgeoisie under the leadership of Nehru and then began a process of coopertion with the ruling classes, gaveup armed struggle and the path to liberate the Indian masses and placed their entire political work within the framework of parliamentary system. The trade union movement also was affected by this line. E.g. CPI led unions have defended the public sector as a form of socialistic enterprise overlooking the fact that this is a form of comprador bureaucrat capital. They have ignored the growth of the contract system in these industries, overlooked casualisation etc and done next to nothing to make the permanent employees take up the cause of the unorganised sec tions in these plant s. They took no steps to prevent the massive retrenchment of women from the industries where they had a base like coal mines and textiles. Having compromised with the comprador feudal ruling classes and even defended their repressive policies (1975-77) the CPI led unions are not in the forefront of the fight against the new offensive of the imperialists and globalisation.

The women's front of the CPI, formed in 1954, the NFIW has been primarily based among the middle class women, though it has a mass membership, and its focus has been taking up the general issues of women and children and women's rights.

In the late 1940s the CPI led women organised some conferences of working women (Shramik Mahila Parishad) but this was not followed up. The next systematic attempt to bring working women on a platform and highlight their problems was taken by CITU in 1979. They organised a convention of working women in Madras that year. This was followed up by the formation of the All India Coordination Committee of Working Women (AICCWW) at the centre with some state units. The AICCWW has organised three conventions, the first in 1981, the second in Delhi in 1984 and the third convention was organised at Calcutta in 1991. The main aim of the AICCWW was to promote the recruitment of women in unions, take up their problems and promote women in the higher committee of the union. Vimala Ranadive, the General Secretary of the AICCWW presented her report to CITU in 1987, said that, "the trade union movement has to fight its feudal tendencies as part of the working class struggle.... women in thousands participated in strikes, faced jails and repression went through all the privations with men employees. Unfortunately the working class and their unions did not pay attention to their specific problems nor fight for their demands like retrenchment, provision of creches". Reviewing the progress made in the seven years she reported that, "after initial gains in the beginning after 1979 a stagnation period began during 1st 3-4 years and committees formed became non-functioning or inactive."

The main tasks undertaken by the AICCWW was to popularise charter of demands for working women and mobilise women for political call at all India level.

From the reports the Tamilnadu unit put the maximum effort to organise various convention of working women and draw them into their unions. The West Bengal unit concentrated on promoting women's leadership, a necessity in order to consolidate the base of the ruling CPM Government. In Maharastra, inspite of a higher participation rate of women in industry and the service sector this coordination of working women even as a joint front effort was not successful after the first convention.

But the revisionist line of the CITU in keeping with its affiliation to the CPM is developing a narrow economistic consciousness among working women. Since they are not willing to lead an uncompromising struggle with the pro-imperialist Central Government, and in the States ruled by them they are themselves inviting the imperialists, the CPM led CITU cannot fight the policies that have brought so many miseries to the Indian women and draw her into leadership to fulfill her historical task along with the male contingent of proletariat the liberate the Indian masses from the schackles of imperialism and feudalism. In West Bengal they have curtailed unions from vigerously fi ghting the imperialist offensive and raperious policies of private j ute mill owners.

On the other hand the spark of Naxalbari has inspired many women to breakdown the rigid barriers of class and gender and work with a revolutionary perspective among workers. Girl students joined factories as workers. Later as the Marxist-Leninist movement has grown women professional revolutionaries took up jobs as part of a plan to organise women workers and bring them into struggle. Comrades Swarnalatha and Swaroopa who were matry r ed fulfilled this task as part of the many activities they under took in the course of their revoltionary work. The ML movement has also taken up the demand for equal wages for women and men workers and succeeded in getting it implemented in the struggle areas in Vidarbha, Bastar and Telangana. Women workers working wit h the Public Works Department, for the forest department and other government departments have particularly gained from these struggles. The various trends of the ML have also generated several women trade union organisers and leaders, especially Maharastra, women who have worked not only with women workers but also with coal mine workers, construction workers, press workers and general factory workers. The main struggles of bidi workers and their organisations have been built up by revolutionary forces in Andhra Pradesh. But on the whole these efforts have as yet only touched a small part of the working class, especially women workers. The task of organising women workers and employees from the revolutionary perspective of making women full participants in the working class struggle and the struggle to emancipate women has only begun. This is not merely a question of gaining formal positions of authority in the trade union movement, but giving the trade union movement an orientation so that traditional barriers and attitudes that are keeping women away from active participation are fought and at the same time the calls to radically restructure family responsibilities so that the double burden on women in eased, become the calls of the entire working class movement.

DEBATE: Protection Vs Formal equality

Meanwhile in the light of the worldwide that have taken change place, various discussions have emerged about what is the best way forward for working women to achieve parity and equality.

In the beginning of this century, the socialist women's movement presses for certain demands to protect the health and in terest of working women and children. Ban on night women for women, ban on work that is hazardo us, restrictions on carrying leads provision of creches and maternity leave, and wage parity. The world over these demands were legally accepted, though is implementation is very limited. But these protective provisions are now being considered as obstacles to the wider employment of women. Employers have raised the bogie tht they cannot bear the burden of this provisions and they should be scrapped. Some women activists are verying to this position in directly. The point out that women in the unorganised sector carry extremely heavy loads, do not get any facilities or maternity benefits, etc. The Government is hypocritical regarding giving protection to women. They argue that instead of banning only women's work in hazardous industries it should be banned for all workers. Similarly for night work.

The same question has come up before the International working class movement. In Japan for example, it was argues around the equal opportunity law. The decade of the 70s and 80s has witnessed rapid entry of women into the workforce and now they constitute over 35 percent of the workforce. Increasingly they are being absorbed as temporary, home based and part-time workers, and paid much lower wages.

In response to the demand of the women for more economic opportunities in 1970s Japanese capitalism said that women workers were "over protected" due to regulations. Women's protection is obstructive lack of skills, physical handicaps like menst ruation, delivey and child care as well as legal regulations like limit to overtime work, night work restrictions was prevent women from being absorbed into workforce. Hence the Japanese capitalist class argued that protective measures rein-

force discrimination against women in workforce. They recommended that there should be legal equality from hiring to dismissal stage, protection for maternity should be reinforced, but all other protective regulations should be eliminated. The World Bank is giving similar arguments too.

On this basis the Equal Opportunity Law was passes in Japan in 1985 amidst debate of p rotection vs equality. This debate has become a world wide discussion. Protection cannot be considered as discrimination. Women's groups are also demanding that what women need is not equal opportunity law, but equality as a result - e.g. the creation of positive conditions so that women can actually exercise their right to work. Women need substantial equality not merely formal equality. The equal opport unity law has made the conditions for Japanese women workers even harder, because if they choose to compete on equal Terms they are thrown unto the most severe competition with men, overtime is forced, and they have no special p rovisions to handle overcome their specific problems. Women who do not choose equal opportunity are forced to accept discrimination in job chances and lower wages. Imperialism is bound to bring the Japanese experience to India in different forms so the women's most must be prepared to confront the insidious way in which, in the name of equality, discrimintion against women is sought to be justifies.

In several occupations like nursing, telecommunications, and the press night shift is accepted for women employees. Gradually the trade union movement has demanded obtained facilities like rest rooms and transport for the employees involved in night work. The Norwegian women's movement and revolutionary working class movement is demanding six hour working day so that women can participate equally and men can share domestic responsibilities.

CONCLUSION:

In women have to gain equality in the economic shpere, women's role in the manufacturing sector needs to rise substantially. At the same time, strategic demands which will go towards altering the traditional division of labour in the family - i.e. the burden of child care and domestic work-need also to be immediately placed as demands of the entire working class movement. The tasks before the working class women's movement in co-operation with the women's movement are formidable but urgent:

- 1. The imperialist offensive and policy of globalisation should be exposed and opposed. This is particularly necessary in the informal sector unless women learn realise the cause of their poverty and under valuation, and at the same time to value their own labour, consider it for what it actually is a substantial portion of the family income not supplementary or secondary, the task of organising working women, expecially in the unorganised sector cannot be successfully undertaken.
- 2. Women in the workshop based, home based industries need to be organised to demand that all labour laws and facilities, like ESI, PF, Maternity benefits are ext ended to them and they are recognised as workers. This is a task before urban based women's organisations too, to lend a hand in organising these women.
- 3. Put pressure on the organised industry unions to support and help the casual, temporary, contract, sub-contract workers connected with their concern or industry to get organised and defend their rights. In fact in order to protect their conditions in organised industries it has become essential to organise these sections, and to struggle against attempts of Managements to contract out work of all kinds, whether it is cleaning and maintenance, or the running of canteens, or parts of the production itself
- 4. In organised industries and offices too the need to take up the specific demands of women and the need for women to become active on their specific issues which include, provision of t oilets and restrooms, promotional opportunities, training and skill upgrading opportunities, transport, medical facilities, extended maternity leave facilities need to be energet ically taken up. Women themselves need to become ac tive on these issues and cannot wait for male trade union leaders to become sensitive to and take up their issues.
- 5. Cases of sexual harrassement at work also must be exposed and fo ught.
- 6. The demant for creche facilities needs to be reformulated. Creche facilities should be available in all est ablishments, irrespective of whether women are employed or not. This will encourage fathers to also take responsibilities of childred.
- 7. Men should be provided pat ernity leave.
- 8. The demand for community kitchens/ subsidised canteens, adequate toilet facilities in industrial belts, estates also need to be raised.

- 9. Hostels for working women, a long standing demand of the women's movement, has to be vigorously put forwar. Only then women can leave the confines of the family and go forward to seek employment and a career.
- 10. Oppose all proposals for part-time/flexi-time work since experience has shown that it is a means to deprive women of full income and job security. It does not, as the European experience show, help to organise house work better eit her. Women find they have to work harder, and find that with the flexible timings make it difficult to organise creches, shopping, banking etc.

Table - 1

lakhs)	% of total labour force		34.44%	34.02%	37.172%	28.98%	31.53%	
tion of women workers (in lakhs)	% of total female pop.	31.70%	33.73%	32.67%	27.63%	23.30%	27.96%	
nen wor	Total	701	418.0	400.95	376.0	405.39	594.02	
n of wor	Service		47.67 (11.4%)	44.07 (11.0%)	52.76 (14.0%)	49.23 (12.1%)	52.44 (8.8%)	29.31 (9.4%)
tributio	Industry		61.37 (14.7%)	54.09 (13.5%)	51.47 (13.7%)	45.54 (11.2%)	68.84 (11.6%)	33.07 (10.5%)
Trends in distribu	Agriculture	(67.01 %)	308.9 (73.9%)	302.79 (75.5%)	271.77 (72.3%)	310.62 (76.8%)	472.74 (79.6%)	250.60 (80.1%)
Tren	Year	1901	1911	1921	1931	1951	1961	1971

Table II

Trend in female employment in decade 1981-91 (census)

	1981	1991	
Total main workers	44.8 millions (100%)	62.9 millions (100%)	
1. Cultivators	14.8 mn (33%)	21.5 mn (34.22%)	
2. Agricultural labourers	20.8 mn (46%)	28.3mn (44.9%)	
3. Livestock, fisheries hunting, forestry, plantations	0.82 mn (1.83%)	1.01 mn (1.60%)	
4. Mining & quarrying	0.16 mn (0.35%)	0.21 mn (0.33%)	
5. Manufacturing, processing	14	1 3	
a) Household industry	2.05 mn (4.57%)	2.22 mn (3.53%)	
b) Other than household	1.61 mn (3.6%)	2.44 mn (3.88%)	
6. Constructions	0.39 mn (0.87%)	0.42 mn (0.66%)	
7. Trade &Commerce	0.92 mn (2.04%)	1.42mn (2.26%)	
8. Transport, storage, communictions	0.16 mn (0.3%)	0.20 mn (0.32%)	
9. Other services	3.11 mn (6.94%)	5.19 mn (8.26%)	

^{*} Million = 10 lakhs

TABLE -III
Labour force in India - 1973

	Organised		Unorg	ganised	Total	
	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural
Male	154.16	12.73	158.74	1258.97	312.90	1271.70
Female	15.30	6.05	56.40	700.25	71.70	706.30
Total	169.46	18.78	215.14	1959.22	384.60	1978.00

Based On 5- Years plan: 1978 - 83

TABLE - IV
Women In Trade Unions

Year	Total membership in TU s (in lakhs)	Proportion of women
1971	54.7	7.1
1976	65.1	6.4
1981	54.0	7.1
1982	30.0	5.9
1983	54.2	7.5
1984	51.1	8.6

Source: Labour bureau Women labour in India

Role of women in North Telangana agrarian revolution

- Uthara Telangana Mahila Vimukti Sangam

On behalf of Uthara Telangana Mahila Vimukti Sangam we express our revolutionary greetings to APCMS for organizing this seminar on "Women's Role in Indian worker's Movement" on the occasion of International Women's Day. 'March 8' has a great international history. The two courageous women Roza Luxembung and Clara Jetkin, who stood by Com. Lenin when he opposed Bernsteinism and second International Revisionism and upheld international fraternity, played a significant role in building women protetarian movement. On March 8 happened great rallies and demonstrations and heroic women's struggles. In this context in the second International Socialist Conference held in Copenhagen in 1910, Clara Jetkin proposed March 8 as International Womens Day. Since then March 8 has been being celebrated as International Women's Day.

March 8 signifies the struggle for the noble Communist society that is devoid of exploitation, for the oppressed people, for women's liberation and ultimately for the emancipation of labour. It is the day of the international unity of the world's working class women. It is the day for us to identify the problems responsibly. It is the day for rallying for the unity of women of all sectors. It is the day to inspire and mobilize the women of all nations for struggles. March 8 is the day when all women unite and take up the pledge to fight for their emancipation.

The revisionist, moderate, opportunist women's organizations have relinquished the highest ideal of international women's movement, that is the socialist revolution, and the essence of the emancipation of oppressed people and women. They are now misleading the Indian women, who will never forgive them. Just as the revisionists made Mayday into a mere ritual and betrayed the working class, March 8 is also being made as such. Such women's organizations and the women in them cannot inherit the international women's movement. It is only those women's organizations and the women leading them who on one hand fight against the inhuman customs and discrimination against

women and on the other fight for the emancipation of all oppressed people and for achieving the socialist society where men and women are equal, who are the real inheritors of International Women's Day.

Some feminists believe that women's liberation is possible without socialist revolution. They too celebrate March 8. They may have honest concern about women's issues. But we strongly believe that complete freedom and liberation for women is possible only through a women's movement that is led on a clear theoretical basis. We appeal to all such feminists to join the revolutionary women's movement.

The North Telangana woman strongly believes that without involving women in social labour, without socializing the household work, cooking and rearing of children, and ultimately without the emancipation of labour, it is not possible to liberate women.

On the occasion of this International women's Day. We call upon the women of various nationalities religions, castes and regions of India to wage a struggle against feudalism, imperialism, fundamentalist, retrograde ideologies by participating in the New Democratic Revolution based on agrarian revolution. For the liberation of nationalites, democracy, socialist and communist society, women,s liberation, complete equality of men and women, the North Telangana Woman calls on all the Indian Women to join the class fraternity and become part of the armed struggle, and calls for the unity of the women workers of all countries.

Women in our country have been getting organized in various regions and waging struggles on various issues for the past two decades. This is a revolutionary development. Those women's organizations have been fighting according to their respective levels of awareness. However, there is a need to build a women's movement on the basis of a clear theory of class struggle.

Today's North Telangana Woman takes after the socialist women like Clara Jetkin and Roza Luxemburg internationally, the heroic women who fought the tyrannical Nizam's army, the Razakars and the Nehru's army in the Telangana Armed struggle and gave up their lives, comrades Nirmala, Ankamma and Saraswati, the martyrs in the SriKakulam struggle. She takes up a gun and walks with the brethren of her class on the path of struggle. She appeals to the whole women's world to take to this path. She believes they will do so.

For generations woman has been the victim of oppression of various kinds. Despite worldwide, countrywide movements, the oppression against women has not come down. It has worsened and has taken up newer forms in the third world countries due to the venomous importalist culture. Some attempts were made for women's liberation in a few countries like Soviet Union, China and Vietnam where there had been socialist revolutions. These revolutions failed and the capitalist classes reclaimed power. Consequently the victories achieved by women to some extent gave way to various forms of oppression and exploitation again.

While the oppression against women worsens day by day, on the other hand women are more and more awakened. They are fighting against atrocities against women, dowry, male chauvinism, patriarchal and retrograde ideologies, and are fighting for equal wages for equal labour, right to property and ecological conservation. Women are taking part in class wars worldwide, from Africa to Kurdish region, from Peru in South America to Dandakaranya. The women of the bottom most classes are growing into guerilla warriors. In the cause of the liberation of nations, liberation of countries, liberation of women as part of world socialist revolution, they are sacrificing their lives. Interrogating and opposing the discriminatory conditions set by religious fundamentalism has begun. It has become a significant phenomenon that women are taking different forms of struggle to match the different kinds of oppression. Different kinds of movements are demanding women's freedom, independence and liberation. Just as it has become a trend for countries to desire independence, for nations to aspire for emancipation and for people to seek a revolution, women's liberation has also developed into a trend today.

We should look at the issues and movement of North Telangana Women in the above context. The North Telangana districts are backward in agriculture. 70 percent of the population lives in villages. Thus 70 percent of women are in villages. The economic, political and social exploitation of the landlords here is severe. Oppression against women is much worse. Soon after a woman attains puberty she has to become a victim to the landlord's lust. Denial invites rapes and murders. It is mainly the poor and labour class which is subjected to such oppression. So the north Telangana women's problems implicitly mean the problems of the rural poor agricultural laborer women who form the 70%. Hence they had to become part of the anti-feudal struggle.

After the repression of the Naxalbary and Srikakulam struggles, agrarian struggles mounted in Karimnagar and Adilabad districts. Gradually the movement spread all over North Telangana. Women who fought against brutal feudal policies were subjected to state repression. The state went on increasing its beastly repression against the women's fighting spirit which sharpened with every blow in the class struggle. Repression led to a higher form of struggle. Wounded hearts hardened. Several women who were physically and psychologically tortured have rededicated themselves to the movement with firmer resolve. Compared to 1978, by 1998 the role of women has considerably become more significant. From questioning corruption and oppression and waging struggles to feeding the guerilla groups and encountering the police forces, they have come a long way. Not even a single small struggle was waged without the women having a role in it. Many women defied death and joined the guerilla groups with an aim to end patriarchy and feudalism. So much so that women form 25 percent of today's North Telangana guerilla groups.

There have been perverse trends in women's movement since past. After the resurrection of Capitalism in China and Soviet Union they have grown. As a result the so called social feminists have remained, in practice, dependant on bourgeois feminism. The ruling classes too favour the bourgeois feminism to sidetrack the women's movements. Anti-communist feminist forces are powerful enough to confuse the statement that only communism can liberate women. There are feminists who argue that women need not be part of a class struggle, that since man is the source of our troubles it is our prime duty to fight against the male chauvinism and only the fight against men will lead to women's liberation.

On the other hand the revisionist and reformist organizations as well as moderate opportunist organizations have become an obstacle for revolutionary women's movement. The movements led by them are steeped in economism. The responsibility lies before us to defeat the anti-communist feminist theories, reformism and moderate opportunism, and build a revolutionary women's movement. Which is the way to womens liberation? What is the relationship between class struggle and struggle for women's liberation? Can a struggle against male chauvinism lead to complete women's liberation? The solution to these questions should be explored in the roots of the social system, with a class

perspective. "Anybody with an inkling of history knows that great changes are impossible to come about without the participation of wokmen" – Marx.

Lenin says: "It is obvious that as long as private individuals own the tools of production women cannot live like human beings and social beings." Our women's movement should be separated from the bourgeois movements being led for women's liberation. Women's problems should be treated as part of social problems and the working class movement. Thus it will be possible to firmly bind it with the proletarian struggle and revolution. Struggle for women's liberation should be a people's struggle. It should be a part of the proletarian movement, the movement for the oppressed and the movement for the victims of feudal, imperialist and capitalist systems. Women's movement has great significance in the historical responsibility of the proletariat and in class struggle.

"Social revolution cannot take place without the participation of working class women on a large scale" – (Women's Movement – Lenin, Clara Jetkin)

Summing up the role of women who fought against traditional oppression, during China Revolution, especially during the Long March, and in the United Front against Japan, Mao says: "Women make half the population. The economic status of the working women is an evidence of the fact that they are subjected to a unique oppression, that revolution is their immediate need, and that they are the deciding force for either the victory or the failure of the revolution." However, the demands made by the bourgeois feminists and the so-called social feminists with regard to women's unique problems are also valuable. We need not doubt their integrity in their concern for women's unique problems. But we have this to appeal to them. That only such proletarian revolutionary women's movement that is built upon sound and definite theoretical basis of class struggle can ever achieve complete equality of men and women, comprehensive women's liberation and ultimately the communist society. That they join the scientific class struggle. We appeal to them that only in the highest form of communist society, where there is no exploitation or oppression, where only the society owns the tools of production, where women are partners in the social labour, only in such a society is it possible to achieve complete equality of men and women. We appeal to them to help build a revolutionary working class women's movement on the basis of class struggle for such a society.

The North Telangana struggle began in 1978.

The Feudal and Patriarchal Exploitation and Oppression in North Telangana before 1978

As in other regions, in North Telangana too women used to be subjected to severe economic, political, social, psychological and physical oppression. Woman was a tool. A machine. A slave to feudalism and patriarchy. Dust under the feet. She should not raise her eyes, shouldn't laugh exposing her teeth, should not relax her body, walk in front of men, show her face to outsider men. Religion, caste, family, state, patriarchy, feudalism and imperialism subjected women to exploitation and oppression at every step.

There may be differences in the forms of exploitation and oppression in the rural areas, the urban areas and in different districts of North Telangana, but there is no difference in the severity of the exploitation.

- Women do not get wages equal to men's.
- Women do not have the right to property equal to men.
- Not getting education
- Ragging in urban educational institutions
- Discrimination in employment
- Discrimination in politics
- Dobsene and vulgar campaign against women
- > Harassment for dowry
- Subjection to atrocities
- Forced marriages, child marriages and polygamy instead free dom of choice in marriage
- Opposing love marriages, widow marriages, inter-caste and inter-religious marriages
- Bonded labour to landlords and dominant people
- > Toiling for the family
- Forced into prostitution
- Customs and oppression imposed by religion, caste and family
- > Infanticides and forced abortions
- > Killing and burning alive in the name of black magic

- Making them into jogini and basivini (prostitutes in the name of god)
- > State violence.

Exploitation and oppression against women mainly takes the above forms. Woman is subjected to greater oppression since caste, religion, family, state and law are all imbued with patriarchal ideology. The state of women in the rural areas of North Telangana used to be wretched. It was worse in the villages where there were brazen feudal landlords. Such brazen landlords like Chinnametpally Jaganmohan Rao, Takkalapalli Divakara Rao, Rechipalli Venkata Reddy, Veldurti Satyanarayana Rao, Akkapalli Gopala Rao, Nimmapalli Bhaskara Rao, Gajasingavaram Rajeswara Rao practised the most cruel methods of oppression in numerous villages of Karimnagar, Adilabad, Warangal, Nizamabad and Khammam districts. We can still see the remnants of their cruelty in many villages. Hundreds of villages were crushed under feudal oppression. The condition of the women of the oppressed classes was much more difficult. There was intense social, economic, physical and psychological exploitation. The women had to sweep the mansions of the lords, sprinkle the courtyards with cow dung water, draw water from the well, wash clothes, bathe master's children, cook, arrange beds and so on. In addition the mistress of the house subjected them to mental torture with cursing and threats. Rice and corn had to be threshed and fill the barns. Milking the cattle, making butter by churning curds, cleaning the lamps and lighting them, taking the children to the lavatory, cleaning them, baby sitting, feeding them, removing dung from and cleaning the cattle sheds, bringing fodder and foddering the cattle, pave the floor with dung, and applying pesticides and fertilizers are only a few of the chores they were forced to perform for which they got leftover food and some gruel. If the poor toiling labourers roasted and ate a few groundnuts or corn from the field, plucked a few vegetables to take home, they were given brutal punishments like being made to carry heavy stones on their back and fined them. Atrocities on women were more bestial. The Telangana landlords practiced rape as a social custom and their right. In some villages the lord's right demanded that the girl be first sent to the lord after puberty. If the lord fancied a woman she was bound to be raped. If the woman resisted she was murdered. Otherwise the husband, or the brother or the father who came to her rescue got murdered. In some villages they even practiced a brutal tradition that sent another woman to the master's bedroom if his wife is pregnant. Women, like men, were not supposed to use footwear. They should not look up. They should not perform Bathukamma in their houses or streets. ('Bathukamma' is a festival unique to Telangana in which women make image of the goddess with flowers and perform with it). They should do so only in the courtyards of the lords. No one else should wear clean clothes in the village. The children should not go to school. The lord should be informed if the relatives come visiting. If the people cane across the lord on the way, they turned aside, bowed till they touched the earth towards him and saluted and gave him way. One should not talk back to the lord. When one spoke to him he should utter 'salutations, lord', or 'Sir, I'm your slave' after every word. Lashes for talking back. Not a single case was registered against the rapes and murders committed by the lords. There was nobody to question him. The lord was the state in the villages.

On many occasions those who were subjected to humiliations and rapes committed suicide. It was normal for many more to become insane. The people had to do the weeding in the lord's fields, plant and harvest. But women got no remuneration whatever for what they did. If anybody had the nerve to question the injustice, he/she was whipped in the lord's courtyard. Women's condition was worse what with a multiple forms of oppression - sexual harassment, humiliation, violence at home, caste and religious customs etc. with the influence of the Hindu Scriptures and ancient codes of law like the Vedas and the Manu code, they learned to grieve and accept their condition as preordained. The mythical characters of loyal wives like Sita and Savitri, the concepts of sin and merit, heaven and hell, entrenched in the culture further made them submissive. In the villages, adjustment and tolerance have become synonyms for a woman. 'Patience like a pestle' was a common saying. Whenever there were rows between families or with the neighbours, women were not allowed to talk. It offended men if women spoke up. There are several proverbs degrading women. 'Wearing bangles' is a very commonly used idiom meaning 'utterly inefficient, like women' referring to the womens habit of wearing bangles. Even in occasional instances of resistance, due to the absence of a supporting political force the women could not organize themselves.

State of women of North Telangana after 1978

Drawing lessons from the temporary setbacks in Naxalbary and Srikakulam struggles people got ready for class struggle in Karimnagar

and Adilabad districts. A heroic struggle began against the inveterate landlords. The agrarian class, crushed under intense oppression, sprang into action. Soon the movement spread to neighbouring districts. Since women suffered feudal exploitation too alongside that of patriarchy, they offered full support to men in the class struggle. This society is not only male-dominated but also a class society. With such awareness did they join the struggle. Gradually the struggle sharpened into new forms. The struggle areas were infected by the police. The atrocities of those khaki forces inflamed the ire of the people further. The movement which began as anti-feudal took on the anti-state character with the entry of the para military forces. It became an armed struggle. The movement took decisive turn as resistance to repression and counter violence to violence. In this process more than 1000 men and women comrades became martyrs between 1978 and 1997. About 70 of them were women. The feudal lords' unrestrained atrocities received a blow after 1978. The women, who had been submissive so far, joined the men to counter them like tigresses. The dust under the feet of the brutal landlords sprang into their eyes. Oppression led to resistance.

The skinny, starving, dirty-faced nobodies formed associations. The dalits who were kept at a distance from the village, the women who knew nothing but grief and tears, innumerable anonymous people who had suffered bonded labour and humiliation now excommunicated the lords. They conducted people's courts and dragged the lords into the midst of people. People demanded for hike in servants wages, abolition of bonded labour, returning of all the customary payments and fines levied by the landlords, transfer of the wastelands and public lands to the people etc.

The movement continued on many other demands in the past 19 years. As 80% of the rural women were from the oppressed classes and all of them took part in agricultural production, women's issues were reflected in every struggle and in every demand put forward by the movement. Beedi leaf issue was mainly related to women. Similarly hike in wages, bonded labour, struggles of beedi making workers, struggles against arrack, struggles against the atrocities of the police and the landlords were all concerned with mainly women. It has become a tradition to make the landlords touch the feet of the women concerned and to make them rub their noses on the ground when the landlords attempted rape.

Women took an active part in the class struggle since the beginning and their role became more and more significant. So we cannot distinguish the women's struggles in North Telangana from the class struggle. In this context men and women together got down to fight against their principal enemy.

In the struggle against feudalism women played their share from time to time. They led struggles exclusively with women as well as along with men for resolving their economic problems, against the feudal lord's atrocities on women and against the state violence. Directly and indirectly they worked equally with men.

They strove to expand their role with more awareness, gaining experience in the class struggle and not backing out in the face of obstacles and sacrifice in the process of struggle. The endurance, sacrifice and militancy that the women showed in critical moments are a model for women's world. Captured by the enemy, they endured torture and humiliation, but valued the movement's secrets more than their life. From Tendu leaf struggle to encounters with the police in various partial, political resistance struggles and in fighting against feudal traditions, there was no struggle in which the women had no role. They are improving their role as activists of the association and of the party, and as the armed ones. On the path of Com. Jyothi, Com. Lakshmakka and Com. Premalatha and other such martyrs they chose armed struggle as their means, understanding the link between women's liberation and class struggle. The mayhem, bestial behavior and massacres perpetrated by the enemy inflamed their wrath, and made them more determined activists.

Tendu leaf struggle:

Before 1978 the exploitation of Tendu leaf contractors was very intense. In every season the contractors along with the government used to exploit crores of rupees worth of worker's labour. In Telangana 90 percent of Tendu leaf collectors were women. In the process of an organized struggle the price of a bunch of Tendu leaves rose from a meager 3-5 paise to 90-95 paise. Similarly the various forms of exploitation that the contractor's clerks practiced are now almost extinct.

Struggle on wage rates:

In the past, wages used to be very low and they used to be paid in the form of grains. The organized agricultural labourers used to go on strike every year for a hike in wages. As a result the wages are now increased to Rs.35 from Rs.3 in the past.

Women in the struggle on Arrack Rates:

In 1989 started a struggle for banning arrack. It is mainly the women who were put to all kinds of trouble because of arrack and the other intoxicants. Women played an active role in the struggle against arrack. By 1990 this struggle spread to hundreds of villages all over Telangana with a demand that the government itself should declare prohibition on arrack. The government tried to sell the arrack through the police.

The struggle took many forms, some of which were, to take out a rally, stage a sit-down before the shops, plead with the drunkard men, send back the jeeps that supplied arrack and destroy the shops. A struggle was also led against private arrack. If convincing and warning fell on deaf ears, the arrack-making equipment was destroyed. Various sections of the society supported this movement. Several demonstrations were held with thousands of people. Liquor and arrack shops were wrecked by the fiery wrath of people and women.

Sales of arrack almost ceased in hundreds of villages of North Telangana by the end of 1991. In support of the arrack contractors the police conducted raids on villagers. Yet it was not possible for them to run the arrack shops. The police themselves took up the responsibility of getting the arrack sold and opened the shops in the vicinities of the police stations, in vain.

This struggle excited all classes all over the state, especially the women. With this influence anti-arrack struggle started in Dubagunta village and spread to several villages and districts. As there was a movement already in Telangana, it became a statewide movement. The State government had to bow down to this militant movement. Thus women proved their mettle of organized struggle.

In the struggles being wage for land, livelihood and liberation, women are broadening their role.

Land occupation struggle was an important one in the North telangana movement. In this struggle that was waged amidst the cruel murderous attacks of the police, women acted as firmly as men. If the men tilled with a plough, women sowed seeds, did the weeding and harvested the crop along with them. The women suffered the different

kinds of repressionthat the police used to crush the struggle. When the police raided the villages men used to run away. Angry for not being able to apprehend the men, the police used to behave more brutally with women. Yet it was not possible for the police to shake the women's determination. The land occupation struggle is progressing successfully with the support of women. Thus it is impossible to imagine this struggle without women's role. As part of the land occupation struggle that was led like a campaign throughout North Telangana, the people seized 5450 acres of assigned land and 1530 acres of podu land (used for shifting cultivation) in karimnagar district, 45 thousand acres of assigned podu land in Warangal district, 16 thousand acres of assigned podu land in Nizamabad district, 9385 acres of podu land and 3000 acres of assigned land in North Telangana Forest Division, 9250 acres of assigned lands of the landlords in Adilabad district, between June 1990 and September 1991. Women have been participating actively in other struggles on agrarian problems like support price, prices of fertilizers and pesticides, low voltage current, seize of landlords crops and seize of mango, lime and sweet lemon plantations.

They are taking part in Dharna and Rasta Roko demonstrations held for resolution of various issues on various occasions, in torch demonstrations and meetings held in protest against fake encounters and repression, and in the funeral processions of martyrs. They are also participating in famine raids, struggles for the support price of cotton and the bamboo struggle. The price of bamboo was 25 paise in 1980 whereas now it has gone up to Rs.5. In 1990-91 30,000 men and women donated a day's labor for the party fund in Adilabad district which came to Rupees 18 Lakhs.

Giving up on the government the people wanted to arrange amenities for themselves and so took up various kinds of welfare activities. Women also took part in donating their labour creating amenities like drinking water, water for cultivation and roads. As part of the rule that one member of each family should donate labour, if the men went to work women looked after their agricultural work or the women themselves went to work on behalf of their families. As part of this program, in 1996 three tanks were repaired and built in Maddimalla village of Karimnagar districti and Tatipalli, Jamgyal villages in Nizamabad district. According to the government's estimate their value was Rupees one crore and ten lakhs. This is only one example of the welfare activities.

Women in the Resistance Struggle against Repression:

The towns and villages of North Telangana have been transformed into police concentration camps. Anybody – irrespective of whether it is a woman, man, child, the aged, student, intellectual or a worker may get a taste of the police stick or the bullet at anytime. Court, law, state, power- everything here belongs to the police.

In the process of the struggle till now more than 1000 men and women were murdered by the police. Thousands of houses were decimated. In this period each family was raided several times by the police. Thousands of women were humiliated. Hundreds of women were raped. Lakhs of people were affected by repression. Hundreds of agrarian youth are being killed by the police in public in broad daylight.

In this background repression led to resistance. The people had to rebel to defend themselves. As part of this, the women's role in resisting the police has been heroic. The enemy continued his brutal attacks to crush the movement which began in 1977-78. At this time men were missing from many villages. In some villages women themselves carried out the excommunication of the landlords. The women learned to fight with courage, since then, amidst the police raids.

Indravelli Struggle:

On 20th April 1981, men and women swarmed in thousands to attend the Indravelli Public Meeting. The police, intolerant of the tribal's organized force wielded their sticks on the people going to the meeting. Yet it was not possible for them to stop the people from pouring in. The exasperated police fired indiscriminately. During the firing a woman by name Bhimbai from Pitta Bangara village killed a police man with her knife in self-defense. A bullet from another side made a hole in her thigh. Wounded, Com.Bhimbai was arrested, convicted and spent two years in prison. Several Gonds were killed in the firing and several more were wounded. Hundreds of people were arrested and sent to prison. One third of them were women.

Satnala Struggle:

In 1984, demanding that the construction of Satnala project on Satnala stream in Pippadhari area be stopped or the people of the villages about to be submerged be paid compensation, thousands of women along with men waged a struggle. The Telugu desam government deployed police forces, intensified raids and arrests to stop the struggle.

The leaders of associations in the forefront were arrested. The women who tried to stop the arrests were abused in filthy language and were treated vulgarly. The police also tried rapes. The women struck back and beat up the police and chased them away. Again the police conducted raids on a large scale and resorted to lathi charge and even firings.

The women who resisted by throwing dung at the police:

The police entered Chintakunta village in Khammam district at 10 in the morning. Only women were there in the village. The police demanded where the men had hidden themselves and threatened the women. The women could not tolerate after sometime and talked back. The police were incensed and jumped on the women. More women came forward to attack the police. The conflict grew intense. When the police behaved more roughly the women responded by throwing cattle's dung at the police. Scared by the women's wrath the police retreated.

Badsi women's struggle:

A people's court was conducted in Badsi village in Nizamabad district against the landlord Mahipal's atrocities on and harassment of women in 1985. As a punishment to his atrocities 60 women beat him with chappals.

Whenever the police tried to arrest the agrarian youth during their raids on villages, the women used to cleverly save the young men and resist the police. In the same fashion they are protecting the dalams now from encounters.

On the morning of 3-5-95, when the police came combing, they came across the dalam and there was an exchange of firing. The dalam managed to slip off. After some time the police caught hold of Manavva, a Badsi young woman, who came to graze the cattle near a well and made her walk with them for hours together. They beat her demanding to be told where the 'brothers' were. They did not heed her pleading that she had to feed her baby. They tortured her to ascertain that she was really a baby's mother. When Manavva, unable to walk anymore, fell down, they left her there.

After they had left her and continued their combing operation, they harassed and tried to rape two more women demanding to be told of the whereabouts of the dalam. When the women resisted, they were left severely beaten up. The torture of Manavva spread like wildfire in

Badsi village. Especially the women were infuriated. They turned against the police who came to the village, abusing the latter. The police beat up Manavva's husband and mother-in-law. Again the people got into a conflict with them. The police wielded their lathis. Though many were wounded, when the people unitedly stood their ground and chased the police, the latter scampered away from the site. The people of Badsi and Chinnapur especially the women later staged a dharna before the District Collector's office. Again a conflict ensued between the people and the police. The police had to retreat.

In the history of the North Telangana Movement these are only a few examples. The women showed resistance several times as part of the struggle. In today's situation, where the police have been brutally killing the agrarian youth, the women often intervened, resisted the police and released their youth. On many occasions when police camped in the village and resorted to atrocities, the women showed their militancy in the dharna and rally programs against the camps and non-cooperation to the camps. Camps had to be lifted in Challagarige, Terumatla, Dhoolmitta, Peesara, Unikicherla and Malkapur villages in Warangal district, Matchupeta, Shoukalla, Putnoor, Palakurti villages in Karimnagar district, Gidda, Esapeta, Bhimnagar and Makala villages in Nizamabad district and many other such villages as a result of the organized struggle of people. The women play a courageous role in protecting the armed cadre and activity. They keep watch on the enemy while these people are in the shelter and collect the information on enemy. In March 1992, inspite of police firing, the women of Gori Kothapalli village helped the dalam escape, with presence of mind. In 1993 during the police firing in Padkal village in Nizamabad district after five members and a policeman were killed in the firing, an old woman acted as a guide, disguised the Dalam commander and helped him escape from the village. In 1984 when the police raided a house in Jangam town, the woman of the house handed over her son, the leader of an association and saved the party organizer from the clutches of the police, displaying more of class affection rather than maternal affection. Thus there were innumerable occasions in which women exhibited extraordinary courage in protecting the party and the association activists.

Thus women are recognizing their role in the class struggle, participating in the struggle along with men with sacrifice and determination, revolutionizing themselves and preparing themselves for higher struggles.

Some landlords bowed to the organized force of the people and surrendered to them. Several landlords bore grudge against people, arranged for police camps in the village and continued their brutal regime. Some landlords fled to the towns. Some were executed. In this process many people and association activists had to lay down their lives. Amidst the ebb and flow, the movement marched only forward. At every step of the movement, women played an admirable role.

However, as a result of a long struggle certain distinct changes occurred in the life of the rural people. Some forms of exploitation were put to an end. In about 1500 villages in the movement areas bonded labour to the landlords disappeared. Some menial jobs demanded by the landlords also ceased. There is now no direct exploitation of the landlords in hundreds of villages. Fines and bribes, earlier paid to the landlords, were abolished. Systems like bonded herds, taxes on ploughs and tails were also abolished. Lakhs of oppressed people, who had led anonymous lives before 1978, now became partners in political activities. There is no harassment of women by the landlords as in the past. The women, who were once restricted to home and farm, increasingly took part in political activities. In villages like Jonnalamalayala in Karimnagar district, the lords there, enthroned in the village assembly, used to pass obscene comments on the worker women coming home and going to the fields. Now such places are vacant and the landlords do not dare to comment on the women. They now pretend to be friendly with the workers and address them politely.

The movement struck a strong blow to the feudal classes that perpetrated unrestricted atrocities on the oppressed people for generations. Thousands of acres of podu land fell into the hands of people. In the midst of the repression the people have been cultivating those lands for 5-10 years. In this process new lands have become old. The people distributed such land among themselves.

In some villages the people are also cultivating the landlord's assigned lands. As a result of these developments a distinct change took place in the economic, political and cultural aspects in some villages. The poorest labourer classes have transformed into small-scale and middle class farmers.

When the landlords directly ruled in the rural areas, the practice of converting women into prostitutes (Jogini and Basivini) for the landlord's sexual needs was very much prevalent. With the landlords

fleeing to the town, this practice also came to an end. In the villages, where movement has its presence, such people are almost absent.

The movement had a positive impact on women. Among the women from the oppressed classes one section gained direct and the other gained indirect experiences of the struggle. As a result of the movement the women achieved two great victories.

- 1) Landlord's direct exploitation disappeared in hundreds of villages. Also ended the economic, social, physical, psychological and sexual oppression by them.
- 2) A section of women who had been restricted to kitchen and agricultural work are taking part in political activities.

Though these achievements may have limitations, certainly it is an advancement for the North Telangana woman. It is a signal of fight against male-chauvinistic morality, feudalism and imperialism.

The rural women of North Telangana have been taking part in agricultural production along with household work. With the advent of the British imperialists the self-sufficient economy crumbled. Smallscale cottage industries and handicrafts were dealt a blow by the dominance of industrial goods. Consequently the women who lost their livelihood and work increasingly joined agricultural production as labourers. 80 percent of women are taking part in agricultural work today. They have become indispensable for agricultural production. Yet a woman's labour has no value since her labour is not compensated sufficiently, the man catches hold of her earnings and she has no right over tools of production. Their labour is denied any identity, value or status on the pretexts that there is a difference in the utilization of tools of production and there is a gendered division of labour. Whenever production methods are modernized or higher technical skills are introduced in agricultural production women are alienated from their work. Their work pressure also increases.

Though the movement had its achievements, as the venomous imperialist culture and consumerist culture made inroads into villages and the domination of imperialist monopolistic companies is strong on the backward countries, the oppression on women has actually increased. Compared to the past, now the older forms of harassment of women and atrocities against them may have receded, but we see violence increasing in newer forms.

Besides exploiting women sexually and their labour, beauty contests are held and in the name of beauty the woman herself is turned into a commodity. This new culture is spreading even to the district centers level thus spreading its tentacles deeper into the society. In order to inject this poisonous culture right from the childhood, 'well baby shows' are also conducted.

Inspite of the changes in the society, all classes of women are being exploited. If the middle class women became slaves to the family and socially crushed under the many patriarchal customs, the working class women in both urban and rural areas additionally suffer the exploitation of their labour. With the entry of the investments of imperialist monopolies into the underdeveloped countries new machinery is introduced, depriving working class women of their livelihood.

Due to the changes introduced in production methods with an eye only on profits and the advent of power looms, several women workers dependent on handlooms lost their livelihood in the absence of alternative work. Mini cigarettes reduced the demand for beedis and its adverse impact is directly felt by the beedi-making, tendu-leaf collecting women.

Thus the production activities carried out for profit by the imperialists and capitalists worsen the condition of women. Though women are partners in social production, household work is associated exclusively with women and they are condemned to serve the members of her family. The woman suffers intense work pressure due to agricultural work on one hand and household work on the other. Yet no amount or kind of labour helped a women derive respect and a suitable position in this society.

State violence:

The ruling classes resort to intense state violence to repress the movements. To damage the fighting spirit they chose humiliation, rape and sexual harassment of women as one of the ways. Since the state too has the patriarchal character, there is more of harassment of women.

For the past nineteen years the government used several methods of oppression against women. The enemy practiced various forms of repression, like arresting, beating in public, abusing vulgarly in public, raping singly and collectively, torturing, and faking up false cases against them. The women were terrorized by destroying and burning the belongings in the house, demolishing the roof or the house and such van-

dalism. Murder was another form. In Karimnagar district Com.Janaki (Sambhuni palli-1992), Com.Safai Narsakka (Amalapur – 1992), two activists, were arrested, tortured and murdered in a fake encounter. In 1994 the Punjab commandoes who had come to Lakkapuram as p. rt of combing operations killed a woman called Rajamma without any reason.

In 1990 hundreds of policemen who encircled Madanapalli village shot four other women dead along with Narsakka in Nizamabad district. In Khilashapur village (1994) Hasina Begum, a sympthiser of the association, was burnt alive by the landlords and their henchmen. In Ramareddy village Sayavva, the area committee member of Mahila Vimukti Sangham, was beaten to death by the police and ABVP thugs. Thus the women of the rural and urban areas of Telangana have been subjected to state violence for the past 19 years. Since the law too is in favour of the ruling classes there is no control on the uncivilized activities of the police. Around 2000 villages are constantly subjected to the police attacks.

Thus the women are being oppressed by patriarchy as well as feudalism and imperialism. On the other hand they experientially learn the nature of the ruling classes and choose the struggle as the means of resolving their problems.

The Structure of Mahila Sangams (Women's Associations):

For the past 19 years the condition of the structure of Mahila Sangams has been very weak. The women are not organized in a structure as much as they participate in the struggle. The movement could not overcome the structural problems encountered in the process of struggle. The women, though failed in building an independent sangham of their own, still participated in the struggles led by various people's organizations with the support of the latter. In this process though we initiated village-level structures of sangham, we could not enhance membership on a massive scale. It also happens that the sanghams fall apart due to repression. It is not an easy task to build Mahila Sanghams and make them effective in the midst of the brutal repression clamped by the enemy in the rural areas. This is the most important of obstacles in building Mahila Sangham. Fundamentalist, retrograde culture and traditions also come in the way of women coming forward to join the struggles.

In the past these women's association were merely called Mahila Sanghams (Telugu for Women's associations), but in January 1996 the name changed to Mahila Vimukti Sangam (Association for Womens emancipation). After reviewing the past activities we made some advance in the structural work. Recently we have taken up campaigns against male domination, dowry system and obscenity, and in some places, protest activities. These underground organizations are now working at the village and area levels.

All of these are underground organizations. The conditions in rural North Telangana are not conducive to build Mahila Vimukti Sanghams openly. No sangham that aspires to fight for complete women's liberation is ever allowed by the ruling classes to operate. Even if they allow, it is only temporary. So in view of long term interests underground and open organizations have to be initiated in accordance with the repressive regime. In order to make use of legal opportunities, Mahila Vimukti Sangam uses the cover organizations. It builds cover organizations as well as underground Mahila Sangams.

The way to Women's Emancipation

Mahila Vimukti Sangham believes that unless the following conditions are fulfilled it is not possible to achieve women's emancipation:

- 1) The woman should be freed of the household work
- 2) Women should be made part of the social production. The value for women's labour should be enhanced.
- 3) In place of traditional, arranged marriages, marriages of men and women's choice should be introduced.
- 4) The present system of family should perish and a new system of family should be formed that has love, respect, freedom, independence and equality.
- 5) Patriarchal, male chauvinistic culture should be rooted out.
- 6) Women should be brought into leadership positions in educational and political activities.
- 7) They should be given the right on tools of production.
- 8) Women should have as much right on property as men.
- 9) Household work and cooking should be kept in the social domain.
- 10) Rearing of children should also be in the hands of the society.

Mahila Vimukti Sangham feels it is its responsibility to build revolutionary women's movement as part of the New Democratic Revolution also fights against patriarchy the womens movement also fights against feudalism and imperialism. This movement is a complete antithesis to bourgeois feminism. The interests of working class, poor, agrarian women are primary to the revolutionary women's movement. With this primary commitment it builds alliances with likeminded middle class and professional women. It also appeals to the feminists to join the struggles on specific problems of women. It strives for issue based united fronts.

The women's movement considers the contradiction with the working class man as a friendly contradiction and that with feudal and imperialist force as an inimical one. It believes that revolutionary men can play a key role in building women's movement. It is not possible to achieve the demands of the women's movement without the active support and participation of the progressive forces among men in them. The relationship between men and women should be such that they should unite to fight and fight for unity.

We believe that the complete liberation of women is possible only in communism. But for the sake of their immediate and long-term demands they should be organized under the leadership of the pro'etariat and wage a long armed struggle along with their class brethren. Only this will guarantee women's liberation. This is the right way to women's liberation.

The problems of the Tendu leaf collection workers in Dandakaranya and their struggles

- Krantikari Adivasi Mahila Sangham, Dandakaranya

Introduction:

Dandakarnya is a widespread forest region comprising six districts (Bastar, Gadchiroli, Bandara, Rajnandangaon and Malkangiri) of three states. Though the government records recognize the forest region in Madhya Pradesh and Orissa only as Dandakaranya, Our struggle area encompasses the six districts with an area of one lakh sq.k.m and a population of 70 lakhs. In these six districts, Adivasis make up above 60% in Bastar district, 45% in Gadchiroli, 35-40% in Bandara, Rajnandgaon and Balaghat., 40-50% in Malkangiri of the population. In all the districts of the extended Dandakaranya tendu leaf collection has been a practice for several decades. Except for a few hilly terrains like Abujmad in Bastar district where there is no transport facility, in the rest of the places tendu leaf collection takes place in different methods. Especially, in Malkangiri in Madhya Pradesh, the government itself takes up the collection of tendu leaf in the name of 'nationalization' while in Maharashtra (Gadchiroli and Bandara districts) private contractors take up tendu leaf collection by paying tax to the government. Let us learn about the details and the background.

Collection of Tendu leaf:

Most of the tribals and non-tribals in Dandakaranya take part in tendu leaf collection. They earn their livelihood by joining this collection work in tendu leaf season. It is mostly women who are involved in this work. Everybody including the children and the aged get busy in cutting and carrying loads of tendu leaf tirelessly. Tendu leaf collection is like harvesting a crop for the very poor families of Dandakaranya. Compared to the collection of all other forest produce it is in the collection of tendu leaf that more people participate. Tendu leaf collection creates relatively more days of work and wherever the private management takes up the collection all the family members find work and earn livelihood.

Tendu leaf collection tasks are performed in two stages. Wherever a private management takes up the forest on contract by paying the tax to the government, in the first stage (Feb-March) the stem of the plant is chopped off so that in forty days the plant grows well and produces quality leaf. Such a work is done in 1-2 days in the fields surrounding the village and in the forest adjacent to the village. But the government does not permit such activity. Especially in Maharashtra the Forest Department avoids providing such labour on the pretext that the plant would be spoiled. But some farmers, hopeful of harvesting better quality leaf, take up such activity in their fields on their own. Generally the contractors get such things done by paying a small amount to the whole village and making an agreement with them. However for above a decade the workers stopped this method after realizing the deceit in the agreement. They either demand higher wages or fight for daily wages for all those who participate in the activity.

The tendu leaf workers have imbibed the traditions of struggles hoist May-day flags and get to know about the contractors' reaction to their demands. Wherever the contractors agree to pay wages according to the workers' demand, collection activity begins after polva. Or else strike continues.

Tendu leaf collection - Laborers' travails:

There are two kinds of beedi leaf collection. One kind of leaf grows from chopped stems, which we have learnt above would be of superior quality. The other is the jungle or wild leaf. The collection of the former variety is done from private lands.

As soon as this is over, the collection of wild leaf begins. The leaf from the chopped stem is ready a little earlier than the variety. Further ever the government pays one rupee more per shekda (a hundred bunches) to the leaf from private lands.

The plight of the laborers during the collection of leaves is reflected well in their songs. They have to brave the attacks of wild animals and concentrate on the leaves. They leave their homes at the break of the dawn and enter the forest. The more the competition the earlier they have to start work. Usually each laborer works in the vicinities of his/her own village. According to the government regulation one should collect leaves only within assigned units of a particular contractor. It is considered a crime to collect leaves from the unit under one contractor and sell them to another contractor.

Collection of leaves is usually taken up in the month of May when the severe heat dries of their mouths. The labourers have to use the drinking water they carry very sparingly. It is fatal to use up the water at the wrong time, since water resources are not available everywhere in the forest. Moreover one may fall behind the others in the collection if one goes in search of water. Often water is their only food throughout the day. If there are two or three members from a family they carry Ambali (starch) in a gourd. Or they make do with just the left over food or starch of the previous night consumed in the morning. Starving, they have to work quietly clipping the leaves with one hand and hold them folded with the other. If the leaves are very dense they go clipping the leaves with both hands like a machine, ignoring the painful bites of scorpions and other insects. They have to get so busy that they cannot even notice the others pain. It is heartrending to see these poor people collecting leaves in severe heat in the dried up forest, where drinking water is scarce. Their lives do not know the comfort of footwear. But the Adivasi women, unable to bear the sore feet make 'foot wear' by fastening about ten leaves of a particular variety (modugaku) to each foot. One has to prepare the 'footware' afresh every morning. Otherwise they cannot even walk the next day with sores in their feet. On the other hand the wild flies frustrate them with their noise and by attacking all parts of their face. Constant carrying of heavy stacks of leaves on the heads causes hair fall and inflammation of crown of their heads, which lack oil treatment. Every chore in life is a battle to be accepted without compliant. In the evening they have to reach the kallam (the depot where the leaves are bought by the clerks of the contractor) and wait till the kalledar (the clerk in charge of the depot) buys their stock. The women are the ones to be in a hurry to go home.

After the sale they come back almost running home. If there are infants waiting to be breastfed at home, it is difficult to describe the anxiety of the mothers to reach home. And they have to light the firewood, cook for the family, feed them and at last its' her turn to take her share of the food. They work like a machine and cannot rest before ten in the night. When the body is completely tired and is eagerly waiting to hit the bed, if it is a married woman, she also has to fulfill her husband's 'needs' on the bed whenever he desires. Again before the cockcrow the pounding sounds all around wake her up. She has to pound the paddy, prepare the gruel (Ambali) and run to the forest. It is agonizing to see how, for a months meager wages, an additional burden of work falls on especially women. But this is not all.

How many leaves should a bunch have?

There are two methods prevalent in the three states in Dandakaranya. In Madhya Pradesh and Orissa a bunch should consist of 50 leaves, while in Maharashtra it should have 70. Generally a bunch is asked to be made up of fewer leaves, So that the leaves are dried up faster. If a bunch falls short of leaves the buyers don't accept it. If they get a little suspicious all the bunches are examined. It is because of this fear all the laborers in their innocence add a couple of leaves extra to each bunch and see to it that the clerk does not get angry with them at the collection center. What a trouble the poor illiterate Adivasi women suffer in all this! They first make a bunch counting 35 pairs of leaves. To make each of the next bunch they keep arranging the leaves in the fork between the thumb and the index finger till the bunch reaches topmost joint of the index finger. Then the bunch is compared with the first one. All the other bunches are made in a similar fashion. There are always more leaves than required in each bunch, never less. Even when only 25 pairs are required these illiterate toilers follow the same old custom. We can understand through this how these people are ready to lose but never deceive or exploit others. The laborers themselves have to procure and suffer the harassment of the officials of the Forest Department in trying to procure the fibre twine to bundle up the leaves.

Leaf collection center and the exploitation of the Bunches:

Telugu people call the leaf collection center as kallam. It is called Kada in Gondi and Phadi in Marathi. The one in charge of this center is called Kalledar (clerk or diwanji). He is the one mainly responsible for buying the tendu leaves. In the evening, at around 5 o'clock he reaches the center. A 'watcher' assists him. The watcher unites the bundles, counts the bunches and informs the clerk who writes the numbers down. The buying duration depends on the number of labourers. Generally each day's purchase is over on the same day even if it is late in the night. The petty exploitation of the tendu leaf labourers by these salaried staff apart from the real exploitation of the master (contractor) can be seen here. This petty exploitation takes many forms like Gampakatta (the basket bunch), Vettikatta, and Pochamma katta.

Gampakatta: While counting the bunches of leaves the watcher sets aside one bunch for every shekada (100 bunches). The staff says all those bunches that are set aside are meant for remembering the total number of bunches, but it is a lame excuse. The employees snatch up

these bunches. If each labourer gets around 4 to 6 hundred bunches after hard toil, one can imagine how many such gampa kattas are accumulated.

For instance, if the assigned target of a collection center is one lakh bunches, one thousand bunches are exploited publicly. If this is expressed in terms of the rate paid in 1996 in Gadchiroli it amounts to Rs.1200. This is one form of exploitation.

Vetti katta: This is another form of exploitation which takes place through the religious sentiments of the poor people and so is called Pochamma katta in some places. Depending on the cunningness of clerk, each labourer has to allocate at least one bunch to the clerk per one day's sale or for the total day's sale. All these bunches are shared by the employees of the center. Further if a few bunches remain after the wholesale count and purchase the labourers leave them at the center for free. Such is the exploitation at the collection of the bunches, while at payment of cash for the purchases another kind of exploitation takes place. The labourers are not paid fully on the pretext that there is no change. The generous Adivasis put up with all these. Moreover the employees plead with the labourers to give them a share of their collection. The labourers have to oblige.

This is minor compared to the large scale exploitation of the contractors, who often try to avoid paying the labourers. Some contractors make payments only twice or three times a week taking advantage of shortage of cash in the banks. Making payments in such a haphazard manner they finally abscond without making last payments. This is yet another type of exploitation.

Tendu leaf and sexual exploitation:

Since the season for tendu leaf collection is short (a maximum of one month) sexual exploitation is relatively low in this sector. Since the relation with the buyers is limited only to the collection center, the condition don't allow for forming relationships or flirting with young women. However such things are possible if the same clerks, their colleagues or superiors come regularly every year; they may tempt the Adivasis with money and plains culture. But it is not possible to form relationships as during the work on bamboo bushes. However it is proper to discuss here one possibility for such things in the context of Tendu leaf.

Tendu leaf grows extensively in the forest. No contractor can collect as much leaf as he wants just by recruiting the people of the scatGadchiroli division has proved this. So the contractors get migrant labor on a large scale from the neighboring states or districts. Though there are both men and women in such groups, women form the majority. They all settle near a good water resource. The contractor arranges the collection center near where they stay. Such center or kallam is called 'Labour kallam'. Usually such kallams are situated away from villages. Women from the migrant labour are engaged to cook for and fulfill other needs of the kalledars. Here we can observe the sexual relationships formed by tempting the migrant labour with money.

Further, children or those who can work on smaller wages are engaged to dry the leaves at the center or to turn the bunches for the other side to dry up. It is possible that the clerks engage the women they like for such work. After the leaves are completely dried up while filling them in the gunny bags water is sprinkled on the leaves so that they do not break. Those who fill such bags are called 'loading labour'. Generally these are all contract male labour who come from outside. However wherever the nearby villages demand that such work be provided to them it is possible that women are engaged for this task. Loading is done in the night. Usually it happens in cool early mornings. So the clerks or their superiors (girdavar or chakkar) may form sexual relationship with the women working at such odd hours.

However we can say that compares to other labour work, in Tendu leaf collection, which is stressful and done in a short duration sexual exploitation is lesser.

The contractor, exploitation of wages and surplus value:

Tendu leaf lobby is undoubtedly one of the ruling class lobbies in this country. Some people have become millionaires after taking up tendu leaf contracts for decades. While Sultan Ahmed (of chennur taluk, Adilabad district, Andhra Pradesh) is reputed to be the king of Tendu leaf, Warangal's Narsimha reddy and Praphullabhai (Gondia, Bandara district, Maharashtra) are familiar figures as members of parliament. There are also others like Abbubhai (photo beedi), Dev Maharaj and Mallelawal (Zillah parishad chairman, Gadchiroli) one often hears these names in the tendu leaf collection in Dandakaranya.

All these people earned enormous profits by paying meager rates to the tendu leaf labour. In 1980's only 4 paise was paid per 50-leaf bunch in Bastar district, while in Chandrapur district (today's Gadchiroli

was part of this district) only 3 paise was paid per 70-leaf-bunch. According to an estimate 20% of tendu leaf production in India is done in Dandakaranya itself. Hariatram Visveswara Rao Maharaj (ex-MP) worked in the interests of the contractors by using his influence among the labourers. Till early 1980's they had their say.

The government gives the wild leaf on contract in two ways. One is the target method and the other is the lump sum method, where the whole forest is given on contract. In the target method the contractor should not collect more leaf than the assigned target. In the lump sum there is no limit to the collection. But the government official play hand in glove with the contractors and in the interests of the contractors allow illegal collection centers on the sly in both the methods. Leaf collected in such centers is not accounted for and the contractor need not pay Tax for it. One may ask as to why forming illegal centers when the whole forest is given on contract. That is the cunning part. All the leaf collected by the contractors is transported into the godowns only after the approval of the Forest Department officials. If the true amount of leaf collected is recorded the government increases the tax the next year. So the contractor would not be honest with an eye on the next year's profits. If he is, it would be against the capitalist policies and rules. From Madhya Pradesh government, the contractors obtain lease for the forest on the basis of bunches. 1000 leaf-bunch is taken as a standard unit to calculate for the lease. This unit is called the 'standard bag'. Except with the labourers, in the rest of the whole process it is only this unit which is used. Laborers are paid in terms of bunches or shekadas.

We have seen that the contractors purchase tendu leaf from the labourers in terms of bunches. Many of these contractors have relations with beedi companies. The companies provide a large part of the contractor's capital. Their business flourishes with mutual understanding on their profits. The contractors sell the tendu leaves in the beedi market in kilogram. The weight depends on the size and quality of the leaves. Usually a standard bag weighs about 50-60 kilograms. Which means 15-18 bunches weigh one k.g. The market rate of the leaf would be about Rs. 30 – Rs. 40 per kilo. The principle of supply and demand would anyway apply. At the rate of Rs. 40 per kilo, each bunch would fetch the contractor Rs 2 Ps 60. The labourers in Gadchiroli could get their rates enhanced in the past 15 years from 3 paise to Re 1 Ps 20. But the Madhya Pradesh government collects the leaf through "societies" and exploits the labourers by paying them the least rate, that is 35 paise.

(We will study this in detail later in this paper) Even if the contracter spends about 40 paise on each bunch under miscellaneous expenditure each bunch earns him 100 paise. We can easily see that the Madhya Pradesh government gets three times more to its treasury. All this is undoubtedly the profit earned by out night exploitation of the Adivasis. In addition, the extra profit on the leaf, for which tax is not paid, in anyway there. The Adivasis who have no rights on the forest suffer all kinds of problems to collect the leaf and the capitalists of this country exploit them as they like. While people like Birla, Thapar and Bangore are in the bamboo sector and the Japanese imperialists take away the famous iron ore from the heart of Dandakaranya, the different minerals in Raighat, Bodighat, Kuvvemar (Bastar) and such places are exploited by several multinational companies. If all the wealth of the rich Dandakaranya is transported away leaving the local Adivasis in dire poverty, what else can people do except revolt against the exploiting ruling classes?

The Tendu leaf strike:

Strike became a great weapon after 1980 for the people of Dandakaranya to achieve their just demands. The tendu leaf struggle has a significant place among the Dandakaranya struggles. Even now various revolutionary peoples organizations are continuing their uncompromising struggle under the leadership of the revolutionary party against the government and the private contractors. Following the footsteps of the Andhra Pradesh Government, the different state governments are trying to see to it that revolutionary movement does not strengthen in Dandakaranya. Shocked by strikes and peoples struggles, the Maharashtra government gave up the idea of nationalization of Tendu leaf. But despite the opposition from people the Madhya pradesh government has been protecting the nationalization since 1984 with the help of the khaki forces. In Orissa, the government itself has been collecting the leaf from the beginning.

The various class struggles in different divisions of Dandakaranya had different experiences in the tendu leaf issue. In Bastar division while the private managements did the leaf collection till 1989, since then the government itself has been committed to the collection through 'societies'. The class struggle extended to Balaghat and Rajnandgaon districts in 1989-90. From the beginning the tendu leaf collection has been taken up there by cooperative societies. We will discuss the details in the context of the tendu leaf strike.

Cooperative Societies and Tendu leaf collection:

The creation of cooperative societies was a result of the cunning tactics of the government to strike a blow against revolutionary movement. They are formed on the basis of villages. There are 5 to 7 committee members in each society. They represent the government or the political parties but not the toiling labourers. The labourers have no place in the societies. The government announces the rate of payment to the labourers before the collection of leaves starts (March-April), and releases funds to the societies. The purchase affair starts from then. Finally the government continuously talks about distributing the 'bonus' to the labourers through the societies after deducting the expenses from the amount earned from the beedi market by selling the leaves. This is the brief explanation of the cooperative societies.

Nevertheless there has been no record of which card received a regular bonus, since 1989. Members of the societies are also not informed of the details of the profit. But the government extensively campaigns through the media about the profits. Only when the workers organized rallies with thousands of people on a large scale in various towns like Pakamsur, Narayanpur and kondagaon in March '96, could they get the bonus of 1991. For the past three years the government stopped declaring bonus. But it has not stopped campaigning that it is a welfare activity.

Strikes and Victories:

With the awareness that struggles brought them, the people realized that it was naked exploitation to pay just 3 paise for 100 bunches each with 70 leaves. And they called for a strike demanding a higher rate in the Gadchiroli division of Dandakaranya. The contractor had to bow to the demand and in 1982 raised the rate to 6 paise. The tendu leaf workers realized their own potential with this victory and started calling for strike to achieve their just demands ever since. When the rate escalated to 16 paise by 1984 the Maharashtra government was shocked and soon decided on a tendu leaf collection policy and reduced the rate to 10 paise. With this reaction, the people started protesting by calling for a strike in every season from 1985 to 1988. The people organized through various peoples organizations, and the tendu leaf workers continued challenging the government with unflinching determination. Adivasi Mahila Sangham was in the forefront of struggling women during the strike. Finally when it was declared that 18 paise be paid per 'shekda' in

1988, the strike was called off. The people proved wrong the estimate of the government that the people and the tendu leaf workers couldn't withstand the strike with empty stomachs during the strike. The government again handed over the tendu leaf collection to the private contractors. Nevertheless it has been declaring the minimum price as a routine every year. While the minimum price announced by the government was 46 paise per 'shekda'. The people achieved 1.20ps per 'shekda' through their struggle and the tendu leaf workers of Dandakaranya stood on top with highest rates in the country. If the Maharashtra government had to concede higher rates in the struggle areas of Dandakaranya than those in other areas, it was nothing but the achievement of the peoples struggles there. The Dandakaranya struggle experiences reveal that the people can achieve their just demands either from this exploiting government or the contractors only through fighting.

We have seen above that in Bastar district of Dandakaranya the contractors who used to pay only 4 paise per bunch with 50 leaves each, paid 30 paise by 1989 because of the struggles of the Tendu leaf workers. Moreover, we have also seen that in the great Bastar district itself the contractors paid different rates in different areas. Usually the rate in West Bastar used to be higher than that in South Bastar. This difference used to be there in the governments declaration of the minimum rates itself. The reasons that the government flouted were not at all related to the workers labour value. Quality of leaf or transport problem or something else was cited as the reason. The revolutionary struggle laid bare the governments lack of awareness of the fact that the difficulties that the Tendu leaf workers face in the collection were the same. So when all the Tendu leaf workers brought forward the non-discriminatory demand that all workers be paid the same rate, by 1986 in all the struggle areas the same rate was applied. But this did not go far. By 1989 Madhya Pradesh government chose to follow the footsteps of Andhra Pradesh government. On the other hand while the Maharashtra government abolished the nationalization policy after unsuccessfully implementing it for 4 years in the neighboring division in Dandakaranya, the very next year Madhya Pradesh government foolishly adopted that anti-people policy.

Tendu leaf protest:

Protest spread like wild fire whenever the contractors or the government refuse to accept the demands of the people and the Tendu leaf worker and try to repress the struggle. At one place, if the payments are

not made, the collection centers may go up in flames. Elsewhere, if the employees behave obscenely with them or make a cut in the payments, the management may get a sound beating. Or else, if those who cheated them come again the next year the people may extract double the amount as compensation. Thus protest against the exploitation policies of the private contractors took different forms. Ultimately in some places the private contractors who fell in the habit of cheating the workers were also banned from entering the forest. If the protest took this kind of forms with the private contractors, against the government policies the protest took a different form. The workers express their demands more seriously by destroying the property of the Forest Department. Such large-scale destruction of government property was taken up in 1996 in Bastar and Balaghat divisions as a reaction against the government's indifferent attitude to the strikes and protests of people. Various revolutionary peoples' organizations also called for 'bandh' in the struggle areas to awaken the people on a large scale. The 'Krantikari Adivasi Mahila Sangham' called for a bandh on 15 April 1997 as part of the peoples protest expressed in various novel forms every year.

Though the people have been demanding 50 paise per shekda for the past four years Madhya Pradesh government enhanced the rate from 30 paise to just 35 paise. The people, the democrats and locally various political parties are coming forward condemning the government policy of repressing just demands of the people. Let us discuss the details.

Tendu leaf and peoples Mobilization:

People are getting mobilized on a large scale, irrespective of the gender on the tendu leaf issue which is a main source of their livelihood. The people who had no experience of waging a struggle against their problems are now gaining expertise in fighting. Though the oppressed people were forcibly mobilized once to Nagapur or Bhopal by their leaders or the bourgeois parties for their own influence, it is now a thing of the past. But now these very people learned lessons in struggle through revolutionary policies are gradually habituated to stand united and fight in the past 15 – 16 years. Various forms of struggle are now coming forward in this process. Well before the tendu leaf season, the labourers collect signatures on their demands notice under the leadership of people's organizations in every village and submit to the nearby officials every year. But the government never pays heed to the peoples application forms.

Next, as the leaf collection days draw nearer, people's reaction grows stronger. They distribute the pamphlets in the name of their revolutionary peoples organizations in all the divisions of Madhya pradesh, stating their demands and condemning the government policies. They also stick wall posters in every village. They do everything they can to campaign. But which government has the integrity to pay attention to such action?

Realizing the fertility of such campaign the revolutionary peoples organizations mobilize people on a large scale for ralley and dharnas. Such large scale mobilization has been seen in all the movement areas in Bastar district. In 1996 on different occasions one lakh people voiced their just demands on the tendu leaf issue. Compared to the rallies taken out in Narayanpur, Kondagaon, Pakamsur and Bhanupratappur, more people participated in the Sukma rally in kunta taluk. 35,000 people participated in this rally out of which 8000 women went ahead to sukhma center. Several real issues of people saw the right because various political parties participated in all the rallies in the name of "Joint Action Committee". But no political party goes beyond submitting a memorandum or lecturing from a dias even while working on people's issues. They do not stay with the people until the issue is resolved. People are also realizing that they use these opportunities to consolidate their votes and once that purpose is served they disappear.

For the past four years the people of Bastar district have been fighting on the following demands:

- 1. 50 paise should be paid for every bunch of 50 leaves. (In the neighbouring districts of Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra 2 paise is demanded for each leaf)
- 2. Collection center (Kallam) should be formed in every village.
- 3. Leaf collection should be conducted at least for a month.
- 4. Payments should be made on the same day of sales.

Having formulated these demands the tendu leaf workers called for bandh in Bastar, Balaghat and Rajnandgaon districts on April 15, 1997 and are involved in mobilizing large sections of people two months in advance. Let us hope their attempts prove successful.

Guns cannot clip the Tendu leaf:

In early 1980s come the tendu leaf season, the khaki force used to spread throughout the forest. For every 5 kms, camps of special police forces each with about 7-9 policemen used to be set up. To see to it that

the people do not resort to strikes in the tendu leaf season, all the state governments used to hand over the fighting Dandakaranya to the guns of the police. Even when the private contractors accept the strike demands and go about their work, the police used to attack the interior Adivasi villages. Apart from destroying the people's property, they used to rape the pregnant or feeding mothers who could not go to work. Toddy, poultry and goats used to be whisked away. Police cases and torture were ready for those who dared to say no.

But the people did not bear their atrocities for long. The people and especially women themselves resisted the police atrocities. If one verifies the records of police camps that appeared in several villages in Gadchiroli district during 1985 – 88, one mainly finds the history of the police who were beaten up and kicked around by women. They beat up a policeman who had raped a pregnant woman in Rondavai village of Etapalli taluk. They stood up fighting till they got suspended the police who settled in Rajaram village of Airi taluk. The police faced such humiliating defeats in Kunta, Basagudem, Madded, Kondagaon and Kesakal areas in Bastar. Enraged by this scenario the government started increasing the police forces in Dandakaranya, which is still continuing.

The government which cannot provide minimum medical facilities to the people and education to their children is ready to spend crores of rupees on establishing police stations every here and there. As if on a battlefield the khaki forces are deployed with latest weaponry and transport and communication facilities in Dandakaranya in summer and they conduct repressive campaigns with different names like action plan, operation Bisak, operation godavari and Jan Jagarana Abhiyan to dilute peoples awareness and control them so that they do not resort to any struggles. The governments have been using such repressive methods and attacking people especially in the past 5-6 years. The police take up various operations to blow up the strike and eliminate the underground activists of the revolutionary peoples organizations who lead the strikes, by combing the forest and especially keeping a watch on the water resources. On some occasion the forest department resorted to even such silly tactics as to get the tendu leaf collection initiated by their own staff to bring a split among the workers. With all the tactics to split the workers force and the threat of the guns, the government has not been able to counter the united force and struggles of the people.

Throughout the strike period the women go around the villages campaigning for not backing out on their demands and condemning the

gather the men and women in every village and explain in their own language how their struggle is just. If there are on the struggle committees mother with infants, they go on the campaigns with the infan's on their shoulders. Further, the women who want to increase their wages and resist exploitation policies, every April as part of tendu leaf struggle preparation, spend at least three days in 'political training' classes and learn about the nature of exploitation. They also discuss the functioning committees, managing of debates and the enemy's repression. As part of the classes in the evenings they also discuss how these developments, unimaginable before, are moulding and would henceforth mould their lives. The committee's role is as considerable in fixing the rates as in afterwards implementing those rates and resolve other problems.

If in the part one decade no clerk in any collection complained that the bunches were not good, it is nothing but the result of the women's struggle and awareness. The managements and their staff now do not dare to demand various kinds of their shares and cuts in the payments. The committees immediately help any worker if she or he complains of any injustice. They take up the issue and confront the culprit. They don't leave the culprits either till the latter apologize or pay compensation. The demigods, who once nicely pocketed the workers wages, now with the intervention of the committees not only surrender the money they pocket but also plead for forgiveness. Especially when they are forced to touch the feet of the women in apology, though the male arrogance resists it struggle, they have to act according to the people's verdict in front of the committee. Whether they are village patels or sarpanches, they realized what happens if they take up the responsibilities of the kalledar or other responsibilities and cheat people. So they learned that it is better to be one among the people. All this happened only due to the awareness of people as part of the revolutionary movement. While the dispute resolution with the private managements is as such, let us now see how the people, and especially the women respond where the government takes up leaf collection.

The struggle committees inevitably come into existence during tendu leaf season. Whether it is the government or the contractors who take up tendu leaf collection, the workers know that they have to get ready to achieve their demands and prepare for the fight. If the government takes up the leaf collection, the struggle committees have to put up a stronger fight. Instead of negotiations and rallies at the village

level, they have to go at least to the taluk range offices (head quarters of the forest officials to submit their demands notice. For this the struggle committees conduct large scale campaigns well in advance mobilizing the people and especially the women. The women who became equipped in the process of struggle to negotiate with the contractors in her village and forest, is now even prepared to go for negotiations and challenging in the urban atmosphere too, wherever the government policy is being implemented. On many occasions women stand at the forefront of such demonstration and raise their demand - slogans even breaking the police cordons. In fact whenever such demonstrations are made in towns it is women more than men who remarkably lead them. They are even prepared to get into conflicts with the police in order to bring their demands to the notice of the officials. Thus, the tradition of confining women to home is happily receding. The condemnable traditional morality of distancing the women from policies has no more place in these struggles. Now in Dandakaranya the foolish formulations like 'a woman is a child bearing machine' are getting outdated and the recognition that a woman is part of not only reproduction but also of production and has equal responsibility in social development is fast gaining ground.

The Additional Demands Achieved Through Struggles:

When there was no impact of the revolutionary movement, and the private contractors dominated over the people, they never used to form collection centers in smaller villages. Similar system prevails even now whenever the government is collecting the leaf. It results in the poor people suffer from hunger and thirst. It is an anti-people policy to form the centers in bigger villages or where the leaf is abundantly available. The stronger people may be able to go to far off collection centers, but what about the aged, the women with infants and the physically challenged, who cannot walk far carrying the bundles of leaves? With the summer grows the leaf, which means a little money. Either they can pay up the debts with it or subside their hunger. How miserable they feel, after a long hopeful waiting, when they come to know that no collection centers are formed in smaller villages!

In August and September the farmers go through drought conditions having then stock or grains down in the soil and the crop being not yet ready for harvest. There is no other way for them than to approach the more well-to-do for the ploughs and loans. The poor people take loans from the richer accepting all the latter's conditions. The tendu

leaf season is a main source for them to pay their debts. Thus a major portion of the poor peoples earnings during this season goes to the 'sahukars'. A few of their needs are fulfilled with the remainder. If they cannot get a loan on trust, they are forced to pledge their women's meager jewellery or the utensils. They do this out of hope for the tendu leaf season. Any threat to the collection of tendu leaf is a life and death issue for the poor people.

The movement showed the way to such questions when the women of the small villages got organized demanded for a collection center in every village and achieved the demand, they were highly emboldened. The people also enjoyed additional relief in the form of rent paid by the contractors for the centers, a few jobs at the center for the villages and other opportunities to work for the collection center. But this exploitative government opposes this demand too like it does with other demands. But the tendu leaf workers refuse to give up this demand and every year add it to their list of demands and fight for it.

Consciousness among the Tendu leaf women workers:

We have already mentioned that is mostly women who are involved in tendu leaf collection. Then they worked from dawn to dusk they once had no role in the matters of fixing the rate for the leaves and taking part in the issues related to the leaf. The idea that a woman has the control over the wages she earns did not once make sense. But the women we were organized in the revolutionary movement transformed the past situation. They started negotiating about reasonable rates for the leaf with the blood sucking contractors. They participated in fixing the rates. In all the issues related to tendu leaf the women started to take part actively. Let us go into the details.

As a result of the revolutionary movement that spread to Dandakaranya after 1980, every year the people have been voicing their demand in an organized manner. Not only do the women voice their opinion on the fixation of rates they also become part of the Tendu leaf struggle committee, which strives to involve all the people in the strike until the demanded rates are fixed. When the contractors come to negotiate the rates several men and women participate in the negotiation along with the struggle committees of all villages. It is remarkable that even the married young women who never dared to come out of their homes and to involve in the village administration and politics before the "Gotul" are now participating check by jowl with their men in the

negotiations with a kosk (a man from the government). If the demands are accepted by the contractors the work begins. Or else the committees determine to continue the strike.

Organization through class struggles:

It is a great achievement in the lives of women for them to get organized due to the revolutionary movement. It is indeed a revolutionary development for the women to get organized through their "sanghams" in a society which looks down upon them as ignorant and low. This did not happen coincidentally or as a token gesture. There is no use bringing women out of sympathy into ineffective organizational forms that are limited to slogan - raising. In the struggles that have proved the true potential of women, the tendu leaf struggle occupies an important place. Though the bamboo struggle, the drought struggle and the agricultural labourers struggles too made great contributions since tendu leaf is basically related to womens labour the struggle in this sector has a special significance. In spite of incessant and venomous campaign the enemy could not resist the organization of people inspired by revolutionary struggles and messages. 'Adivasi Mahila Sangham' came into existence in such a context. When the women started getting organized into this organizational form locally, the necessity arose by 1991 to create a single organizational form for the whole Dandakaranya. As a result the "Krantikari Adivasi Mahila Sangham" (KAMS) was formed. Much help was extended by men through "Dandakaranya Adivasi Kisan Mazdoor sangh" in the formation of Mahila Sanghas. They took lot of initiative in bringing their own wives, nearest relations and the women of their villages into the sanghas. Except for a few 'demigods' (dominant, pro-government and fundamentalist men), the masses, with the trust they developed in the revolutionary politics that gave them the taste of victories in their struggles, never resisted the organization of women. On some occasions they encouraged their daughters and women of the village to become part of the sanghas, to conduct struggle campaigns, to sing and dance and help in revolutionary cultural performances. One can undoubtedly say that initially the help rendered by men was a great fillip to the womens organizational form to come into existence.

KAMS, that come into existence in the light of the traditions of struggles, as a result of the victories in struggles and in the midst of daily repression, now fights in the battlefield of Dandakaranya as a tes-

The problems of the Tendu leaf collection workers in Dandakaranya and their acting let 101

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timony to the courage of the women. It is not a small thing to stick to the sangham while fighting on one hand to break the shackles of tradition, and on the other withstanding the guns of the police, the arrests and the tortures. Though the enemy escalated the atrocities against these women, they did not step back. The enemy is going to the extent of killing them in fake encounters. In February 1993 he kidnapped at a time 4 KAMS activists from villages like Bevartola of Bandara district in Maharashtra which were centers for the activities of sanghas. Despite such events the women activists reiterate their commitment to continue the class struggles. Some democrats who respond to issues of human rights toured Dandakaranya, collected fact finding reports on Bevartola incident and submitted to the courts that civil liberties were seriously violated there. But the court acquitted the police in 1996. Undeterred by such incidents the mahila sanghas strategise their future struggles getting trained in revolutionary politics.

Tendu leaf and the Environment:

We need to look at the tendu leaf issue from the environmental perspective too. Tendu tree is one of the most populous species in Dandakaranya. It not only provides the beedi leaf, but also produces edible fruits for the local Adivasi people. If these fruits are dr'ed and stored they come handy in the rainy season. Because of the large scale availability of these fruits the local people certainly go for storing them.

The contractors with their profit motive want to collect as large a quantity of leaves as they can. So they bring migrant labour from distant places for this purpose. Further, because of the Bangladesh war refugees flooded into India and the government settled them in some areas of Dandakaranya under the name of Dandakaranya project. With these two kinds of migrant labour, the local workers face severe competition. These migrant labourers, encouraged by their own poverty and the contractors cut down the trees and take away the leaves without looking at the needs of the local workers. Thousands of trees are felled in this process. In fact, there is not much loss if the branches of big trees are cut down. But as the contractors bring about splits among the workers with their money and get their things done contrary to the interests of the local people, two problems arise, 1. The long-term interests of the local people are threatened. 2. The deforestation caused by the felling of tendu trees leads to the degradation of the environment.

When the local people brought pressure on the contractors through their sanghas, the felling was controlled. Even on this issue it was the women who took the initiative to agitate partly because it was their responsibility to collect and store tendu fruits. Such issues reveal that during the intensifying stage of class struggle in Dandakaranya the men and women there should take decisions with much foresight to resolve the issues that are born out of another issue.

Conclusion:

Whenever the tendu leaf season begins the government is gripped with the question as to who has control over the tendu leaf. In order to prove their domination in the Gadchiroli division the police resort to all kinds of tricks. For instance, if the revolutionary peoples organizations demand for Rs. 1.20, the police force the contractors to implement either Rs. 1.19 or Rs. 1.21, but never the demanded rate, insisting the revolutionary peoples organizations should not have their say! In Madhya Pradesh the government announces from time to time that peoples welfare is its objective. The Chief Minister time and again talks of negotiations with the revolutionaries. But they do not have the integrity to fulfill the demands of people. The reason is clear. The government cannot decide whether to bow down to the demands of the revolutionary people.

On the other hand the people declare that they would never give up the demands and have stuck to the warpath with determination. Not only the people of Dandakaranya but the fighting people and democrats as well, remained with the oppressed people. People are invincible. It will be proved time and again that the Dandakaranya, which is now fighting with the exploitative contractors and gaining victories, will also at any cost fight with the entire exploitative mechanism and continue the struggle, with the spirit of 'our forest – our leaf', for true liberation. And 'Krantikari Adivasi Mahila Sangham' will lead the struggles staying at the forefront of the women.

The role of women in working class movement particularly in textile mills

-Tamilnadu Pennurmai Kazhagam

The working women in factories in India are small in comparision with the t ot al labour force. After the First strugggle of the Text ile Workers in 1928, the Trade Union Movement d rew in women workers, whenever direct action was taking place in factories and whenever the union gave call for stgruggle, the women were in the forefront of the struggles fighting with great courage and sacrifice. There were some significant strike, struggles as well as demonstrations of workers in which women workers played a significant role. Let us see the struggle in which women were in forefront. Instances of there militant fight against maneuvres for the Madura Mills, Madurai and the B & C Mills, Madras which we discuss in detail.

The specific case studied here is of women textile workers in Madras, Madur ai and Coimbatore during the years between the first and the second World Wars. The focus of this eassy is the consciousness of women workers and the forms in which this was ar ticulated. For this, various protest actions by women workers such as for higher wages, against sexual harassment and for bet ter conditions of work at Mills are taken up for examination. Both organised actions through unions and spontaneous protests of strikes occured in Madras. Though we do not have evidence of women's membership on any large scale in unions and their active involvement in the process of unionisation, it is quite int eresting to not e there were members of the union by the late 1920s and 1930s.

Back ground of the mills:

Madras, Madurai and Coimbatore are the foci of Industrial developed areas in Tamilnadu. In these Centres, the main industrial activities are the production of cotton yarn and cloth. The number of cotton mills in Madras Presidency in 1911 - 1912 was, with a total number of 386, 424 spindles and employees numbering 22,489 on average. By 1937 there were 47 cotton mills in the three major cities grew from 15,963 to 45,803 in 1936-37. The labour force for the industries was

drawn from the villages circumscribing the towns. The workers maintained a live contact with their villages. In times of crisis, the workers could go back to the villages to find work in agricultural sector. Ties of caste, clan and religion were carried to the cheris in which these workers lived. These factors of identity and kinship were manipulated by the management during strikes.

Women at the work place

Women do have access to work, but proportionately less than men. There is distinct disparitily between male and female workers as regards the kinds of work they are assigned. Women are given lowly paid jobs in the mills as reelers, winders and waste pickers. Other works are rarely alloted to them. Correspondingly women are given wages lower than those received by their male counterparts. Most of the women workers are indebted. Women are employed for long hours bet ween 5.00 pm. Their hardship is aggravated by the practice whereby children and women not infrequently r emained in the mill, until such time when their relation were free to accompany them to their homes. Thiis is b ecause popular feeling is against the practice of permitting women to go our alone at night. It's o ut come is that the total period of abscence from the home for the women is between 14 - 141/2 hrs. After this women have innumerable domestic duties to perform.

The factories including cotton mills, ev aded the payment of maternity benefit to women. In Choolai, two women workers who had been dismissed by the Management when in advance stage of pregnancy were reinducted only after the pressure from the Madras Labour Union. Though there are some legal provisions, women are given the maternity benefits only aft er the prolonged struggles by the workers. Those women who came back af ter pregnancy to work in the mill had to bribe the maistri to be put on the roll. The workers were completely cont rolled by the mast ry and complaints gainst mastry are innumerable. The mastries domination of women workers had an additional dimension of sexual exploitation. The prolonged 1920 Madura Mill strike was provoked by the molestation of women worker by a maistry. The maistries at times used foul language calling women workers immoral et., if their productivity came below the expectation of the supervisiors in the mill. Women on having work during the period of confinment had to pay rupees four to five to the maistry to obtain the job once again.

Unionisation of Workers

Harsh working conditions, oppression at the workplace and erosion of their real incomes, either because wages constantly trailed prices as the latter or because the management effected cuts even in nominal wages, led to organised re sistance by the workers.

By the end of the First World War, unionisation of workers had begun. The first instance was in the B & C Mills on 27 April, 1918. After that a number of unions came into e xistence like The Kerisine Oil Workers Union, The Public Works Department Workers Union, T he Madurai Corporation Workers etc. After the war when the industrial wages did not keep place with the rising price index, there were many strikes. Between 1921 and 1930 a number of strikes occured in Madras.

Membership in Trade Unions

Registered Unions	No. of Workers						
	Men	Women					
1927-28							
B & C Mills	2117						
MLU	7320	120					
1929-30							
B & C Mills	868						
MLU	5504	229					
1932-33							
B & C Mills	263	-					
MLU	2459	30					
Madurai Union	324	130					
Koimbattoor Union	244	Sen Sen					
1933-34							
B & C Mills	329	~					
Madras MLU	2798	77					
Madurai LU	446	125					
coimbatore LU	219	-					

The Madr as Corporation Workers Union demanded the minimum wages of rupees twenty five for men rupees twenty for women and also asked for speedy implementation of Maternity Benefit Scheme. Similarly P.W.D. Union too demanded nimimum wages for men and women along with the provisions of facility like creches, maternity benefit and milk for the children of women workers.

As interesting strike is that of kerosine oil workers on 18 September, 1930 when they stuck work opposing retrenchment of 35 women workers who were to be discharged in favour of cheap mofussil labour. By the end of thirties, the cotton mills witnessed a series of strike for better wages, in specific and good working conditions in general, in which women's participation was very high.

Women in Unions

When a women worked in modern cotton mills, it did not automatically remove the burden of tradition on her as traditional forma of subordination pe rsisted in the family. The need to work after domestic work along with mill work, limited women sccess to tome for political activism. She gets up before four in the morning, prepared food for her husband, his paralytic mother, children, herself, finishes house work, goes with her husband, to the mill five miles away..... to begin day of labour inside the mill. Thus the combination of the role of the ouse wife with that of the worker is burdensome. And have to be grappled with as these are a prior assigned in society to women since the time when such division of labour evolved. Hence, the culturally defined role of womanhood coalscing in motherhood further limited scope for women's involvement in union work. This was so because af ter long hours of work at the mills, it was impossible with their homely duties to attend late evening meeting and other meetings of union. Though we do not have evidence of women membership on any large scale in unions and their act ive involvement in the process of unionisation, it is quite interesting to note that they were members of the union by the late 1920s and 1930s. The first incidents of womens participation in union proceedings in the 1918. According to a C.I.D. report on December9, 1918 at a public meeting of the Madras Labour Union at Perambur barracks road addressed by B.P. Wadia, there were three thousand men and twenty women and it was announced that hundred more women had joined the union. These women became part of the union, swimming against the tide - pressures from the family, the management and

society in general. Instances of their militant fight against manoeuvres, trying to prevent their activism to the union are available for both the Madras Mill, Madurai and B & C Mills.

Women in Strike action:

During the period, 1914-1939, there are plenty of instances of women workers, either spont aneously or as part of the Union, rea c t ing to issues affecting them at the workplace, be it a question of wages sexu al appr ession (or) victimisation. The earliest strike is Madura Mills strike.

The Madura Strike April 12 - June 1920

The reason for the st rike is not increased wages or shorter hours of work but protection of honour. This is immediate reason for the strike was misbehaviour of Guruswamynaidu, the head mastry with a women, Villiammal who was dismissed on a f limsy reason of wasting cotton. Thus on April 12th, women demanded the dismissal of mastry and h is repleement by a female mastry. This was the culmination of the increasing desire of women workers to join the Union to fight for better conditions of work. When the women expressed their desire to organise themselves. The mastry began systematically bullying and abusing the women, making their work life miserable and unbearable. This strike of women in the Madura Mill was the first of its kind in the annals of Indian History according to The Hindu new paper. By April 25th the workers at large struck work on demands 1 inging from resignation point in the struggle is that the evolving consciousness of women workers, their protest against the mastry's language and attitude was viewed from traditional angle, as a fight to preserve the honour of women, their chastity and self-respect. In Madurai, the mill management sided with the mastry and broke the strike with police repression and blacklegs. By June 1st 1920, almost all the workers were back at the Mill.

Dismissal of Women in Perambur Mill - 1926

Almost a similar sequence of events took place in Madras. In July 1926, over two hundred women were dismisse by the B & C Mill authorities. The reason given by the management was that since 1911, it had been policy decision of the Management to void employing women. The management started with the women workers thinking that it would be an easy matter to bully the women workers into submission. How-

ever the women proved to be more tough and united than the men for they have in a body resolved to face dismissal rather than disown their union. It was evident from this dismissal that these women were dispensed with because of their political activism, of their association with the union.

Strike at B & C Mill

Besides, when women workers of the B & C Mills became members of the Madras Labour Union, 250 women workers were dismissed on account of their joining the union. This intimidation of women workers was revoked, when the middle class women's organisation, the women's India Association demonstrated outside GokHale hall against B & C Mill authorities.

In fact after the dismissal, the women workers severed connection with the Union. Much as women were getting integrated into the prot est movements of the time,, the disabilities imposed on them continued to be used consciously (or) unconsciously by the management.

Women on Strike action:

Women took part in large number of struggles ag ainst wage reduction and discrimination. In 1923, there were strikes in Madras where women workers protested against decrease in wages. From 4th to 6th April and ag ain from 4th to 11th of May, seventy women workers of the reeling department Choolai Mill went on strike, but the management did not acceed to their demands. Therefore they resumed to work without success.

In 1931, at Madura, in March there was a major strike. The reason for the strike was the demand of the union which was not even recognised by the managements. Those involved n umbered nine thousand of whome over two thousand were women. The management tried to dissolve the union but came to logger heads with the labourers. The astonishing reaction was the spir it of women workers. They were willing to hold out for another six weeks if necessary for the assession of their elementary right to form a union. Their discipline at the meetings was perfect and the word of the union was law to them.

At Kaleswara Mills, Coimbatore, when the management did not keep its promise of reducing the cut in wages from twenty five percent to fifteen percent on February 15, 1934, women of the reeling section, numbering 210, struck work. In the afternoon, 230 men of the spinning

sect ion struck work in sympathy with the women. The strike assumed large proportions when the union took up the issues and consequently an increase in wages was secured in a set t lement made on February 23.

On july 15, 1935, 240 women coolies of the reeling department at Pankaj Mill, Coimbatore, struck work demanding an increase in wages for reeling yarn. They r eturned to work on 17 July 1935 only when the demand for increased wages was compiled with.

In the major textile mill st rike in Madurai in 1938, there was considerable involvement of women workers. On february 6, a meeting of labourers was held in the evening at around 7.00 P.M. in which about three thousand men and five hundred women participated.

In yet another meeting near Pandyan Mill on 11.2.1938, five hundred men and two hundred women attended and on February 19, 1938 in a meeting of Pandiyan Mill workers at Manalmedu, two women workers addressed on audiance of 250 men and 350 women.

Coimbatore witnessed several industrial disputes between 1936 and 1939. This was an outcome of the development of organisations among the workers, their greter involvement and last but not least, wage with and price increases which brought then to the lowest level of existence economically. There were vide spread st rikes at Saroja, Sarada, Rangavilas, Coimbatore Spinning and Weaving, Lakshmi and Rajalakshmi Mills. In these strike women plaed an extremely active role.

On October 5, 1937 a large crowed of strikers were outside Rajalakshmi Mills. Women in large numbers mobbed Abbaynaidu whi was taking black legs to work in the mills. And in three other mills in Singallur, women workers picketted the mill gates, armed with shoes and broomsticks.

In the Saroja mill a new tact ic was adopted during the strike. The picketing leaders dissuaded the workers working in the reeling sect ion from going to work and thereby paralsed the work as, without them, the last process of reeling work could not go on. This was on March 1, 1937 and the management was forced to bring women labourers from outside the next day.

In Sarada Mill, Coimbatore 65 workers sitting inside refsed to go out. Tey sqatted on the road in front of the mill entrance hinder ing movement of the mill manager's car. Some women lbourers protested themselves before the car. However, the police let the car go, where upon the labourers stoned the vehicle heavily. This was on February 18,

1938, in Lakshmi Mills, in the strike on 12.11.1937, the number of males involved was 480, that of females 320 and night shift workers 350.

The participatory action of women workers during the strikes were not less milit ant them those men. They were active in picketing, brickbatting and stoning. During the str ike in Madurai Mills in 1931, Shiva Rao was the spirit of the women workers more than that of the men. In meeting of strikers during the textile mills strike in Madurai, women volnteers spike and advised the labourers to be united and asked for better wages and bonus. In fact in a culture of violent militancy that developeded in Coimbatore, Madurai and Madras during the period of tumultous induustrial strike in the late thirties, women were extremely active. The fact that women workers ghereoed the manager's car outside the Sarada Mill in Coimbatore during a strike in 1938 is one example of th is trend.

Again on November 11, 1946, Coimbatore Textile workers struck work at 6.30 A.M. Two hundred workers including many women were picketing at the mill gates. The police brought in blacklegs in lorries. But by 8.00 A.M. one thosand m ore workers arrived for picketing. The blacklegs were asked by the management to go int o the mill, trampling at the picketers under roof. But the picket ers resolut ely stood their ground. (Table)

The police let loose a violent lathi charge rifle butts and bayonets were freely used. A reserve policeman threw down a women worker, Ammu in the Kaleswar Mills and fixed his rifle butt on her chest. She snatched the rifle from h is hand. Another const able standing close by shot Ammu dead at point blank range. The police retreated into the mill and started firing on the unarmed mass of women workers.

A woman worker, Subbotha was shot dead when whe was helping the men workers. A women worker with a wound in her head and a but in her neck was taken to a nearby house. She had some water to drink. Immediately af terwards she ran out, still pleeding profusely and joined her comrades, who were facing the police.

At 9.30 A.M. a train from Mettu palayam arrived the dead body of woman worker was lying on the line and the police asked the driver to run over the body. The driver refused outright. The police then had to come and take away the body.

As soon as the firing stopped, the workers, two thousand five hundred of them, with two women workers marching at the head reached the Union office. The police tried to bar their entry.

A woman worker ran to the head of the procession cry ing out blood'. Another woman with a bullet wound limped up to the head of the procession to face the police.

Thus the women have been act ively involved in organised protest action at the mill. They were mobilised on specific issue to women and on issues concerning the workers generally. Their part icipation was milit ant. Hence, it is justified to conclude that their active role in struggles are examples for the social change. There is a sure victory of workers.

Details of the mills involved in first general strike, 1937 in Coimbatore district

for														
Reasons for strike	Bonus	Bonus	Bonus		Bonus		Bonus	Not known		Bonus		Not known		Bonus
No.of workers participate in strike	810 M&F	All Workers	892 M	502 F	490 M	492 F	329 M & F	218 M&F		851 M	162 F	281 M	35 F	
No. of workers in night shift	350 M		M 698		525 M		163 M	148 M						
No. of workers in day shift	568 M & F		1,228 M	536 F	W 099	513 F	298 M & F	M 681	120 F	1,166 M	200 F	368 M	296 F	
Date of the strike	October 27	October 28	October 29		October 29		October 30	October 30	*	October 30		October 31		October 31
Location of the mill	Singanallur	Coimbatore	Coimbatore		Peelamedu		Coimbatore (suburb)	Singanallur		Singanallur		Uppilipalayam		Coimbatore
Name of the mill	Saroja Coimbatore spinn-	ing and Weaving	Kaleshwaran		Radhakrishna		Murugan	Janadhana		Vasantha		Coimbatore Cotton	mills	Combodia

Beedi workers prepare for struggle

- Uthara Telangana Mahila Vimukthi Sangam

There are many women in India who get up early, complete all the household work and then go out to work – clad in rags and working as much as men, irrespective of the season. More than half of such women roll beedies. The total number of women beedi workers all over India exceeds 50 lakhs. Beedi workers are the most unorganized of the industrial working class. After agriculture, most women are employed in the beedi industry.

Beedi industry in our state was established in 1920 by Gujarati Marwaris. The backwardness of traders in our state; the extensive availability of tendu leaf, especially in the forests of Nizamabad, Karimnagar, Adilabad and Warangal districts; availability of raw materials for beedi preparation; and availability of cheap labour – these were all the reasons for the Gujaratis to establish beedi factories in these districts, from which they are earning hundreds of crores of rupees.

Important Beedi Industries:

- 1. Desai Brothers, Sivaji & Sivasagar, Telephone these prepare approximately 4 crore beedies per day and their total production is 12 crore beedies.
- 2. Others are Hiralal, H.P., Thakur, Lavangam, M.M., Charbabu All of them are making profits by exploiting the beedi workers.

There are about 10 lakh beedi workers in all of A.P. If we consider Nizamabad district, as per 1991 census the population of Nizamabad is 20,37,621 and the number of women in the district is 10,10,013. Beedi workers number about 4 lakhs which means that for every 10 people, 4 women are beedi workers (10.4). If we add non-PF beedi workers and child beedi labour, the total number of beedi workers in the district is estimated to be about 5 lakhs. Out of the total women population of 10 lakhs, about 5 lakh women work in agriculture and other fields while 5 lakh work in beedi industry.

While the overall percentage of literate women in A.P. is 33, the percentages for Nizamabad, Karimnagar, Adilabad and Warangal are 21, 23, 21 and 26 respectively. Overall literacy rate for women of North Telangana is 22.78 percent.

Taking advantage of the poverty, backwardness and illiteracy of beedi workers, the owners of beedi industries are severely exploiting the workers. The leaders of political parties, who are a part of the regressive state apparatus and who have assimilated the upper caste, bourgeois, exploitative culture, extend their help and cooperation to the beedi industry management to unceasingly exploit the workers.

Just as the Government employs Patwaris in villages to get its work done and doesn't take action on them even if they deceive people or take bribes from people, in the same way, the beedi industries management employs agents between itself and workers to continue its exploitative methods. If the industrialists run their own factories as per Cigar Act and Labour Act, they are likely to lose crores of rupees and therefore, they have created middlemen in the form of Thekedars and Seths.

Beedi Cigar Act 1966:

What do the Beedi and Cigar workers laws say? How are the industrialists and agents able to bypass those laws, suppress the workers rights and continue their exploitation? We can understand these if we study the laws.

As far as A.P. is concerned, the leaders of beedi workers were only interested in using trade unions to make money, until Andhra Pradesh Beedi Union entered the scene. The beedi and cigar workers were so unorganized that, despite these industries being there for a long time and despite there being lakhs of workers in this field, the Parliament did not think about them until 1966. Indian parliament enacted a law in 1966 for the beedi and cigar workers but it took another 2 years for the law to come into effect. In Assam and West Bengal, a notification regarding the applicability of the law was issued only in 1970 while in A.P. the law came into effect from April 1, 1968.

It is not necessary to have huge buildings or machinery for the beedi and cigar workers to do their work. They can roll the beedies at home and hand them over at the collection place. Most of the work gets done under the supervision of contractors. These contractors are called by various names such as – munshi, thekedar, sattedar etc. All those who participate in the beedi and cigar production, even if they work from home, are all workers.

The Beedi act mostly talks about the facilities to be provided by the industrialist or contractor at the work place. The act also established

the mechanisms by which conflicts arising during worker layoffs and distribution of raw materials can be resolved.

Work place means the place where production takes place. Let us first look at the facilities to be provided in the work place.

- 1. Work place should be clean, devoid of dust. It is a crime to make people work in unclean places. The work place should be cleaned with water at least once a week. Disinfectants like dettol should be used in the water. The walls should be white washed or painted at least once a year. The roof should be painted at least once in five years. Walls and roof that are painted or varnished should be washed with water at least once in fourteen months.
- 2. Even while preventing dust from entering, the work place should allow lot of air and light to come in. Windows and doors should be positioned in such a way that they allow air to come in at all times.
- There should be separate toilets for male and female workers. There should be one toilet for every 20 workers. There should be one urinal for every 50 workers. Water should be provided in toilets and urinals. The walls and roofs of the toilets and urinals should be white washed or painted at least once in four months.
- 4. There should be a facility to wash hands and feet with soap after work. There should be partitions or curtains where women wash their hands and feet so that outsiders cannot see them.
- 5. If the number of female workers exceeds 50, crèches should be provided near the work place. These crèches should allow plenty of light and air. They should be close to the work place but not situated in the same building as the work place. The walls and roofs of the crèches should be able to withstand heat and cold, the height of the rooms should be at least 3.7 r. etres.
- 6. There should be good sleeping facilities for children above 2 years. For children below 2 years, there should be good cots or cribs and there should be comfortable mattresses in cots and cribs. Mothers should be provided with chairs for breast feeding. There should be enough toys for the older children to play with. If the children go to toilet, there should be enough facilities for cleaning them.

- 7. There should be a provision for 22.5 litres of water for every child. There should be a sufficient stock of clean clothes and towels. Each child be provided with at least half a pint of thick milk and the owner should pay for it.
- 8. Women trained in child care should be employed as in-charges of crèches. There should be one Ayah for every 30 children. First aid facilities should be provided in the crèche and they should be under the custody of a person who is trained in first aid. Such a trained person should be available all through the working hours and if that person goes on leave or is off duty, the owner should take responsibility to provide another trained person.
- 9. If the number of workers exceeds 250, canteen facility should be provided. The canteen should have separate kitchen and dining hall. The canteen building should be constructed in such a way that there is enough light and air in the building. The dining hall should be able to accommodate at least 30 people at a time. The canteen should be run on a no profit no loss basis.
- 10. No worker should be expected to work more than 9 hours each day. If any worker works beyond stipulated working hours, they should be paid overtime, which is twice the normal wage. Every factory should be closed one day in a week. But, if the work involves only wetting the tendu leaves, the factory need not be closed for that one day but the workers working on that day should be given compensatory off some other day in the week.
- 11. Child labour should not be employed. Women and adolescents (less than 18 years of age) should not be made to work before 6 in the morning and after 7 in the night.
- 12. Workers older than 18 years should be given a day's leave for every 20 days worked in the previous year. Similarly, for those younger than 18 years, a day's leave should be given for every 15 days worked. This leave should be paid leave. If this leave is not used, it should be carried over to the next year. Annual paid leave should not exceed 40 days in case of those younger than 18 years and it should not exceed 30 days in case of others.

Whether or not unused leave can be encashed came up for discussion between Bhagavati Vilas cigar company and Madhura labour court. Madras high court ruled in its judgement in 1979

that since such a facility is not provided by Bidi cigar act, going by the section 33 C(2) of Industrial Disputes act, encashment cannot be allowed. This judgement is to be reviewed. If leave encashment facility is provided for other sections of employees, it doesn't make sense not to provide it to beedi and cigar workers. The parliament should make amendment to the law recognizing leave encashment as a right of workers. If a worker is laid off even before utilizing the paid leave, or if the worker is not granted leave or if the worker leaves the job without completely using the paid leave, the management of the company should pay for the unused paid leave. Section 26 (6) of the law allows a worker leaving the company to be paid leave encashment, so it doesn't make sense to deny that benefit to a worker who is continuing to work in the company.

- 13. Conflicts regarding raw materials are resolved by the labour enforcement officer concerned. These officers decide how much raw material is to be given and how many finished goods are to be made ready. They often give less leaf and demand that workers produce more beedis. For e.g., they claim that the leaf they are giving is sufficient for 1000 beedies but often, that amount will not be enough and the workers will be forced to buy leaf from outside to make the 1000 beedies. Appeals regarding the decisions of labour enforcement officers can be sent to the deputy labour commissioner concerned within 30 days.
- 14. If an employee of a bidi or cigar factory is removed from work, that person need not go to the labour court. The employee can send the appeal directly to the deputy labour commissioner concerned. This appeal should be sent within 30 days. Depending on the strength of the argument in the appeal, the deputy labour commissioner can order the employer to reinstate the employee or pay compensation or if the appeal is not convincing, it may be dismissed.
- 15. If an employee is to be removed from job, the employer should follow the procedure laid down in the law. If a person who has worked for 6 months is to be removed from work, there should be a good reason and that person should be given either one month notice or one month salary in advance. If an employee is removed on grounds of misconduct, there is no need for notice

but an enquiry should be conducted on misconduct. Only if the misconduct is proved in the enquiry can the employee be removed from the job.

16. Other than these, the Beedi workers welfare cess tax law was enacted in 1976 for the welfare of beedi workers. This cess is levied on the amount of tendu leaf given by the employer for beedi production. One rupee of cess can be levied on one kilo of leaf and it is to be paid by the employer. This cess is collected in the form of excise tax. Along with this law, the Beedi workers welfare fund law was also enacted in 1976. The total amount of cess collected is held in welfare fund after deducting the amount that the government spent in collecting the cess. Advisory committees will be established to oversee the welfare fund. Welfare commissioners will be employed to decide on how much amount can be spent from the fund for the welfare of beedi workers. Government will formulate directives on this aspect.

Though the government has formulated so many laws for the welfare of beedi and cigar workers, the lives of these workers remained the same.

Beedi workers exploitation by employers and agents:

Beedi industry owners give the tendu leaf and thread needed to make 1000 beedies to the agents and for every 1000 beedies the agents submit, they are given a commission of Rs 1.80. From the leaf given for 1000 beedies, the agents steal about 50 to 100 gm and give the remaining leaf to beedi workers. Though the management is aware of this, they don't take any action on the agents. The reason for this is that, when the management subcontracts production to the agent, the agents shell out Rs 20,000 to Rs 25,000 as deposit (about 20 years ago, the deposit was between Rs 5,000 and Rs 10,000) and there will be no interest on the deposit. Even if the agent's factory gets closed down, only the principal will be given back to them. There are no service guarantees.

If there are about 10 lakh beedi workers in the four North Telangana districts under consideration, and if agency is given for every 50 workers, then the total number of agents is about 20,000. If each agent's deposit is about Rs 20,000, then the amount of money being

collected by beedi industrialists from the agents comes to $20,000 \times 20,000 = 40,00,00,000 = \text{Rs } 40 \text{ crores}$. So, the employers are able to collect about 40 crores without interest and use it to further their business.

For every 1000 large sized beedies, the industrialists give the agents about 900 gm of leaf, 250 gm of tobacco and thread. For 1000 small sized beedies, they give about 200 gm of leaf, 220 gm of tobacco and thread. The commission is just Rs 1.80 for 1000 beedies.

At every step, the women beedi workers are subject to economic exploitation, domestic violence and state violence.

P.F. deduction from Beedi workers:

Lesser amount of provident fund (PF) is cut from workers' salary so that the management can contribute less towards contributory provident fund (CPF), thus saving them crores of rupees. To do this, the management shows more production by non-permanent non-PF workers and less production by permanent workers. The management need not pay any PF at all to non-permanent workers and by showing lesser production by permanent workers, their PF can also be cut. Thus, the management is making profits both ways.

The agents also make profits both ways by deceiving the workers. They show lesser production by permanent workers so that their PF and CPF are both reduced.

If we consider that the management is paying about Rs. 20 less towards each worker's PF and if there are a total of 50,000 workers in main beed companies like Desai, Telephone and Sivaji, then the management of these companies is earning a total of $50,000 \times 20 = Rs$. 10,00,000 per month just by cheating on PF.

Exemption from sales tax, income tax and excise tax adds up to a profit of Rs. 2,80,000. Interest earned on the 40 crores of deposit given by agents comes to about 4 lakh rupees. So, the profits earned by Desai beedi company owners comes to about 16.8 lakh rupees in a month (10 \pm 2.8 \pm 4). The total such earnings for a year are 12 x 16.8 \pm 2.016 crore rupees. Thus, the additional earnings per year for the Desai company is about 2 crores. By getting exemption from government taxes and by showing the usage of temporary labour, the beedi industries are making profits by severely exploiting the workers.

The basic income of permanent workers in rural areas per 1000 beedies is as below:

Basic pay	18.35
V.D.A	9.5
Total adjusted basic pay	27.85 (basic pay + VDA)
Holidays	1.95
8.33 % bonus	2.32
Total	32.12 (total basic pay + holi days + bonus)

For non-permanent workers, the agents have to pay 32.12 per 1000 beedies without any cuts. But, the agents bluff that nobody can be paid wages without cutting PF. They cut 2.32 as PF and pay only 24.8 per 1000 beedies. There are accusations that in Siricilla taluk of Karimnagar district, the agents are severely exploiting the workers.

If the total beedies made by permanent workers are 26.000 per month, the agents record them as only 15.000 or 20,000 beedies thus reducing the PF to be paid and increasing profits to the management. At the same time, they bluff the non-permanent workers and cut PF from their wages thus adding to the management's profits.

There are also loopholes in the licensing procedures defined by the Beedi Cigar act of 1966. A number of companies are obtaining licenses by showing only half the actual work force. In order to avoid paying PF, the beedi company owners have a nexus with PF and labour department officers. In the process, the government is losing its revenue. Due to the corruption of the officials. the revenue that ought to reach the government coffers from the beedi industries of Telangana as well as Nellore and West Godavari districts is diminished. As per Andhra Pradesh Welfare Fund act of 1987, section 10, subsection 1, every worker should contribute Rs 2 and employer Rs 5 per annum towards welfare fund. If employers do not contribute towards welfare fund, labour department officers are expected to take action to make them contribute. Instead, they are doing just the opposite. As a consequence, workers are losing on - scholarships to children, money for higher education, money for treatment of chronic illnesses, financial assistance for emergencies, funeral expenses. There are accusations that the corrupt labour department officers, in nexus with beedi industry owners, are ignoring the just demands and welfare of unorganized beedi workers even while robbing the government of its revenues.

Relations between beedi agents and workers:

Beedi agents gain the sympathy of workers by telling them that though they pay between Rs 20,000 to 25,000 as deposit to management, they get only Rs 1.80 as commission for every 1000 beedies and they do not get even minimal interest on the deposit paid and there are no service guarantees. Using the sympathy gained, the agents cheat the workers in a big way – in measuring raw material such as leaf, in wages, in cutting PF etc. and in the process they earn lakhs of rupees.

Despite working hard for 24 hours a day, the workers continue to live below the poverty line without even adequate food and clothing. On the other hand, the agents earn lakhs of rupees and lead comfortable lives. The following are some of the ways that agents exploit workers:

1. Cheating in tendu leaf:

Beedi industry owners give agents 700 gm of leaf for 1000 small beedies and 900 gm of leaf for large beedies. But, the agents give only 800 gm for 1000 beedies to workers, thus cheating them of 100 gm. So, for a worker who rolls 1000 beedies per day and works for 26 days, there will be a shortage of 26 x 100 = 2600 gm or 2.6 kg per month. If one kg of leaf costs Rs 20, then the worker has to spend Rs 52 per month on buying additional leaf. In addition to this, the agent also cheats in weighing the leaf. He also gives low quality leaf to the worker and sells the better quality leaf in the market, thus making lots of money by cheating.

2. Cheating in tobacco:

While the management gives 225 gm of tobacco for 1000 beedies, the agents give only 200 gm of it to workers, thus forcing the workers to buy the deficit. If we calculate the amount of tobacco the workers need to buy for 26 days, it is $26 \times 25 = 650$ gm. If the cost of 1 kg is Rs 30, the workers need to spend $0.65 \times 30 = Rs$ 19.5 from their pockets on buying additional tobacco.

3. Cheating in wages:

While the wage for 1000 beedies is Rs 32.12, the agents only give Rs 32 to female workers thus cheating them of $0.12 \times 26 = \text{Rs } 3.12$ per month (assuming 26 working days). Agents cut Rs 2.32 per 1000 beedies from wages of male workers thus cheating them of $2.32 \times 26 = \text{Rs } 60.32$ per month.

4. Cheating in PF:

If a worker rolls about 20,000 to 26,000 beedies per month, the agents record it as only 15,000 to 20,000 beedies and show the remaining amount as being rolled by non-PF workers. However, they cut PF from the permanent worker as per the actual number of beedies rolled while in the factory, the owner pays PF as per the recorded number. For e.g., if a worker rolled 25,000 beedies, the agent will record it as 20,000 but will cut a PF of 25 x 2.32 = Rs 58 (2.32 per 1000 beedies). Whereas, the factory owner will contribute a PF of 20 x 2.32 = Rs 46.4 since the record shows only 20,000. Thus the worker is losing 58 – 46.4 = Rs 11.6 per month in the PF. Due to this, the worker will get less PF at the time of retirement. Since the worker's PF and employer's CPF are managed by government, interest is paid on the total amount and thus the worker loses not only the actual PF amount but also interest on that.

5. Cheating in gratuity:

When the agent records less number of beedies per month against a worker, that worker loses in gratuity also. If 26000 beedies are rolled, then the monthly wages are Rs 803 whereas for 20000 beedies the wages are Rs 642.40. Gratuity is calculated at the rate of 15 days of wages based on the average monthly wage of last 3 months. This amount is then multiplied by the number of years of service. Thus, when the salary is Rs 800, wages for 15 days is Rs 400 and if a worker worked for 15 years, gratuity comes to $400 \times 15 = 88600$. If the record shows 20000 beedies per month and therefore salary is Rs 640, then gratuity comes to $320 \times 15 = 884800$ which means the worker is losing 6000 - 4800 = 881200.

Thus a beedi worker loses money due to cheating in wages, raw materials, PF cut and incorrect records. On an average, each worker loses about Rs 120 per month due to cheating by the agent. For a factory with 50 workers, the agent earns $50 \times 120 = \text{Rs } 6000$ per month by cheating them. With a commission of Rs 1.80 per 1000 beedies, the agent earns $50 \times 1.8 = \text{Rs } 90$ per day and $30 \times 90 = \text{Rs } 2700$ per month. Thus, the agent earns as much as Rs 10000 per month easily. Despite working without respite for 24 hours a day, the workers continue to suffer from diseases such as TB, cough, asthma and cancer and slip further down below the poverty line.

Demands:

- 1. Rooms should be built with sufficient light and air, toilet and urinal facilities should be provided.
- 2. Drinking water should be provided within the factory premises.
- 3. When needed, if the workers prefer to work from home, they should be given leaf.
- 4. Raw materials sufficient for 1000 beedies should be given to workers.
- 5. Every worker should be given work to roll 1250 beedies per day.
- 6. Broken, spoilt leaf should be taken back.
- 7. "Gampakatta" exploitative method should be immediately abolished.
- 8. Exploitation on the name of "chatan" should be stopped.
- 9. "Chatan" beedies should not be rolled by workers.
- 10. It is the agent's responsibility to cut the right amount of PF from each worker depending on the number of beedies rolled by the worker. The agent should verify the computer sheets from the company and ensure that the right amount of PF is cut in both places. Agents and companies should stop manufacture of beedies using non-PF workers.
- 11. All non-PF workers should be recognized as regular workers and they should be given identity cards. If there are non-PF workers, they should be given wages without any cuts as per the beedies rolled by them.
- 12. Medical facilities should be provided to workers at every factory and in every village through the use of mobile health vans. Medicines needed for minor diseases should be kept in the factory itself.

Problems of female domestic workers in Calcutta and in the suburb - A survey

- New Democratic Youth Federation, West Bengal

Before beginning this discussion it is better to make one thing clear - due to our organizational limitations we could not cover up large areas, hence, our survey has to be kept confined within the northern outskirts of Calcutta. Calcutta city, due to its expanse and population, has been transformed into a district and along with the suburbs it is a vast area. Therefore, this report can be taken as an effort of beginning of a survey.

Calcutta is a metropolitan city. But in comparison to other metro cities, its remarkable characteristic is that, here all types of families - the high middle class, the middle middle class, the low middle class, families where husbands and wives are both working or families having housewives and only husbands are working, a family of ten or a family of one keep household workers. Behind this system there are some geographical historical reasons at the root, which lies the socio-economic condition.

The geographical location of Calcutta city is this: it is surrounded in the north, east and south by two districts -North and South 24 Parganas. In the west the river Ganga has separated Calcutta from Howrah district. After Bongaon and Barishat subdivision of North 24 Parganas starts the boarder of Bangladesh. The Sunderban area is situated in the southern part of South 24 Parganas. From Sealdah at Calcutta the frontier of North and South 24 Parganas can be easily reached in only two hours by railways. In the North, beyond Barrakpore subdivision lies the district of Nadia, which can be connected by rails. The railway lines spread even beyond Baracat subdivision (which is also in the North) till the boarders of Bangladesh in Bongoan subdivision; in the south' it touches Diamond harbor, Bajbaj, Canning and Laxmikantapur. Apart from the industrial area of Barrackpore in the North and Bajbaj in the South and tourism or hotel business in Diamond harbour, in other parts (excluding some exeptions), no other heavy or cottage industries have yet developed. Therefore, the ways of income of people living in these areas are too narrow.

On the other hand, the so-called freedom of '47 came through the communal riots of India and Pakistan. Thousands of refugees crossing the boarder took shelter in Calcutta and in its outskirts. As a result population in Calcutta and in 24 Parganas increased. Initially, these people used to stay in refugee camps. During this time even middle-class families, losing everything, came to West Bengal for shelter and failing to bear the pangs of hunger all women, from veiled housewives to old ladies and young girls took up domestic works in well-to-do families in return of food. During the fifties and the sixties the centers of communist parties in West Bengal sprang up from these refugee camps; similarly, it become compulsory that women too would earn along with their men. But since then there were no particular ways of earning, therefore, they got engaged in domestic works. From then on; in Calcutta and in the neighboring areas, keeping "maid servants" in houses became a usage in middle class families. This even became a 'status symbol'. This usage is still now continuing.

Moreover, in the Sunderban area of South 24 Pargans, owners of fishery dams are cultivating fishes by occupying lands, thereby, uprooting poor farmers. Women of such families, finding no other way, are coming to Calcutta to earn and most of them are forced to go for domestic jobs. Mercy of such women is increasing because more of them are coming in the row - they are wives and daughters of workers of lock-out factories in Calcutta and in the suburb.

An announcement has been made by the government that girls from orphanage should be engaged as mid-servants in various houses as to give them opportunity to earn.

All these above mentioned reasons have increased the quantity of 'surplus labour.' In our society, value of labour in case of women in very low. So, though working from morning till nioght, they get minimum wages and due to their ever-increasing number, even this amount is gradually decreasing. It is impossible to say their exact number in Calcutta and in the outskirts but it is more or less one third of the total female population in the city, that is, ten to fifteen lakh.

Before discussing their problems let us first say about those unfortunate children and young maidens who are losing their childhood and adolescence within the concrete walls of flats in Calcutta. For quite a few years, in city flats, working couples, in order to look after their domestic needs and their child, bring young girls from Midnapore and

Sunderban area and force them to work inhumanly in return of negligible salary. Taking care of child for eighteen hours a day in a hostile environment (sometimes they are even physically tortured), completely detached from their failures, the condition of these helpless girls is nothing better than a 'bonded labour'. Rarely, sexually harassed stories are published in newspapers, most of which remain obscure to us.

We made a survey in a semi-slum (it cannot be properly called a 'slum' because here some people have their own houses, though small and other live as tenants). There are about five thousand families in this area. All of them have come from Bangladesh - some come after 47, others much later and many are still coming. Most of their relatives have stayed in Bangladesh. It is a strange rule that though they speak same language and have same culture, it is a foreign land, whereas they have to call the Kashmiris, who are completely different in culture and language as their fellow countrymen. Many of them have been to various refugee camps and Dandakaranya. After rambling through different places and enduring governmental neglect they along with endless uncertainties and poverty have finally came here, though both their above mentioned enemies are still at their back. They have right to vote but are deprived of many other rights. Fifty percent of them have no ration card. Due to various kinds of rules and regulations they are deprived of different types of civilian rights. The occupations of the male members of such families depend mainly on rickshaw or van pulling, helping masons or painting doors and windows. Such jobs are not sufficient enough to sustain their families. So, their women have to go to work in houses because other than stitching quilts and making readymade garments at the time of festivals (that too only thirty percent of them get the chance) no other way of earning is open to them. Therefore, about ninety percent of all the women here take up household works. Their ages range from seven to eight years to even sixty to seventy years.

They work starting form merely middle class areas till far off South Calcutta by walking for half an hour to the nearest railway station and from there travelling for one hour. Trains which reach Sealdah early in the morning from Canning-Laxmikantapur of South 24 Parganas and Bongaon-Habra of North 24 Parganas, are sarcastically referred to as 'mid servants' specials" by office workers. Yet middle class and high middle class families are so much dependant on them that if a 'maid servant; does not turn up a single day, their families come to a standstill even frequently giving rise to severe domestic unrest.

Salaries of these women have no fixed rate. In a house they may be one or two persons or may be ten or twelve. The extent of work may vary from cleaning utensils and rooms to washing cloths, pasting spices, cutting vegetables and fishes and even cooking and doing other household works in absence of the housewife. In case of young girls there is no limit for their works. They do not get any extra amount if excess people come in the houses. Working throughout the month they get minimum Rs. 30 to maximum Rs 200 and for this amount they have to work the whole day. No person in any other work gets such unbelievable low wage!

Let us give some examples:

- 1. Swapna aged fourteen works in a family of two and gets Rs 100. She goes to the work at 7 a.m. and returns at 7 p.m. She does all sorts of work, including washing, cleaning, grinding corn, cooking, shopping etc. In other words, we can say that, in return of Swapna's labour the family of Mr. Mondal runs.
- 2. Mala Mondal stays in a room with a child. Her husband has abandoned her. She gives Rs 100 as rent. She has to carry her child to work and for this she receives xxxxxxx from her masters. Her little one does not understand that if his mother works as a maidservant and he has to live apart from her in order to not to create unnecessary nuisance in his mother's working places. Maladi works in six families and her monthly income is Rs 400. Two families give her meals. On the evening she eats stiff rice with a little vegetables and at noon she remains without food. Her logic is that since the other two houses give her bread with tea in the morning hence at noon she does not feel hungry.

So far we have been talking about low wages hence the economic exploitation. But there are many other kinds of exploitations. In very few houses these women are treated well. All the time they get reprimands. It is possible here that a person can be bought for only Rs 50. Hence no honour is shown to them. Sometimes they are even ashamingly openly referred to as 'maid servants'. They have no holiday in a week or in a month. It they abstain from their work due to illness for even one day, they in return, get only reproaches. Some families even threaten to cut a day's salary. They are not given allowance for medicines or doctors. Previous day's utensils with scraps of meals are kept for the next day. So their work gets doubles if they remain absent for a day. Young

girls become victims of physical torture. Fear prevents them from revolting or if they do disclose such humiliations to their parents, they helplessly console their daughters and again send them to the same hell. Such tortures often reach the state of sexual harassment. Many such incidents remain concealed because these humiliated girls remain silent for fear of losing social and economic security. Often they commit suicide to set themselves free and the actual murderers are exempted from any punishment.

As these women are not organised people are benefited by creating dissension among them. Such as - if their employees for some unknown reason do not like their works they are dismissed by giving a day's notice. Since many women are unemployed competition breaks out among them to get that particular work. A second woman is employed in wage, which is much lower than the one the first women used to get. The second woman does not protest because if she hesitates to accept the job then any other woman get chance for much lower rate. This is like playing musical chair!

This helpless lot is trapped in another way also. After working for six months or one year they get one saree as bonus during Durga puja, the greatest festival of the Bengalees. To with hold this small gift their employees find out excuses to dismiss them two or one month before the festival and they do not have to give any bonus to the newly employed as she had worked for only few days. In this way the wheels of exploitation rolls on!

There is another type of insult of which these women fall on easy prey. It any thing gets last in any house, be it costly or not. All fingers are pointed towards them and without any hesitation they are called thieves. Young girls are physically assaulted. They are not informed if the lost thing is found out or no prayer of forgiving is done.

But the most Machiavellian way of exploiting them is by treating them well. This is the cleverest method as sweet words and good behavior are substitutes of money to obtain excess works from them.

Now let us come to the point what the Left Front Government is West Bengal, enjoying power for twenty years, has done for them. CPIM has formed trade unions of people who are engaged in all types of unorganised works but has done nothing for these female domestic workers because the purpose of forming trade unions were - 1. To get a certain amount from the earning of these workers. 2. They are the cadre

force of CPIM and required in meetings, processions and in various raids. 3. Controlling their works means indirectly maintaining contract over the mass.

Even if we exclude the third factor there is no profit in the first two regarding these female household workers because no amount can be extracted from their low wage and the houses of the party leaders also come to standstill if they remain absent for a day. But the most important fact is that if these women organise themselves and start demanding their rights, CPIM will lose their middle class votes. Therefore, it is dangerous for CPIM to get them organised.

Only after the New Democratic Revolution through socialization of domestic works this problem can be solved and on the other hand women will be accommodated in social production. But no their condition should be improved. These domestic works are now getting organised in their demand of security, a weekend holiday, division of works and pay fixation and ending all sorts of mental and physical torture. And this through their organisec movement only they can achieve their demands.

Women rights violated by state in Assam

Manab Adhikari Sangram Samiti (MASS) & Boro Women Justice Forum (BWJF)

The people of Assam are today the witness to a very critical phase in the history. Man has overcome all the odds of nature and established supremacy above all. Women have played an important role in the progress of human civilization outdoing all the barriers with creative outlook. It is needless to mention that since time immemorial, woman has stood out invariably indispensable with man and has strengthened the basic human values. Still, the new economic equations of the complex big business houses have made such an environment where the woman rights along with other human rights have repeatedly been violated brutally. Woman has been treated as enemies curbing her rights to live with dignity and respect. Assam has been a hunting ground of human rights. The human rights as accorded by the UN charter have become inapplicable and irrelevant for the small oppressed nationalities of Assam. It is a shame that the process of violation of human rights has been today legitimized which has threatened the very existence and growth of the indigenous people of Assam.

It is notable that the socio-cultural tradition of the indigenous people of Assam as well as the North East always treated woman to be respectable. Inspite of this, woman has been victim of some social diseases time to time. Though the new trend of civilization has given woman many legitimate rights for advanced life, the woman in Assam have sorrowfully been made the testimony of gross violation of those rights every day. It has been more horrifying that the Indian state has taken away all the basic rights even of the woman in the name of constitutional rule. They have been treated as the easy prey of state terrorism. During the five decades of constitutional democracy, the women along with the all indigenous people of Assam have got nothing except cruel exploitation, torture, killing, rapings and conspiracy of abuse and feudal fascism from the state. The woman who offered their valuable goldornaments to the Indian Army at the time of adversity in 1962 have now been shattered away during the last decade particularly. Needless to mention that Assam as well as the entire North-East has virtually become a colony of Indian imperialism. The indigenous people of Assam have lost their right over land and all other resources. To make this inhuman exploitation over a nation, Assam has virtually been brought under army rule. As a result, the region of terror has been imposed upon the common people. Assam has become a ground of gross violation of human rights to which judiciary also has failed to give full relief.

We have witnessed particularly during the present decade all forms of harassment, sexual assault, abuses and killings done to woman in Assam. Police, security forces and army personnel do towards woman as they wish at the gun-points in the name of raid and constitutional democracy. The so-called woman commissions and bourgeois woman organisations have been silent spectator to this violations of woman rights. The elected Government has also turned deaf to the gender interest and their right to freedom discrimination and inequality. The state has rather made a conspiracy to create an atmosphere in which woman rights are in no way safe. The life free from fear and assault in unimaginable today in Assam. The woman's right to live as human being has been tampered. The torture, abuse, molestation and other harassment committed by the State forces have been general in day-to-day life in Assam. More over, the rapings and killings after rape or threatening at gun point has been frequent. This has been done as a part of the plan of systematic destruction of the distinct identity of the indigenous people of Assam. Innumerable incidents of woman's rights violation have been occurred during the last several years at the hands of the State of which a few have been quoted below. These are the testimony that are enough to show that the state is more interested in exploiting the land and all other resources, not in protecting and safe guard the legitimate rights of the indigenous people. This shows that the state is determined to continue its fascist rule in Assam at the cost of the valuable human lives and chastity of woman.

Some incidents of human/woman rights violation in brief are given below:

November 28, 1990:

Jawan of Indian Army entered the village Kapuhua near Lakhipathian in Dibrugarh district at night and raped eight women on November 28, 1990. The victims of rape were - Bina Gogoi (married, 25), santi Gogoi (16), Minu Gogoi (married, 25), Mina Gogoi (16), Jamuna Gogoi (married, 30), Laskhi Gogoi (16), Puna Gogoi (16), Minu Gogoi (married, 25).

December 4, 1990:

Two Indian Army men severely raped 14 years old Phulmani Tapna and Karuna Tanee at night on December 4, 1990. They both were Adibashi maidens of Dangbil Christian Basti in Lakhimpur District. Another six Army jawans again rapped Phulmani the next day on December 5. The Army men rapped more girls and women of Phulbari and Dangibil areas later on. Anjana Bora, daughter of Bhola Bora of village Phulbari, Kamalpur was also abused by Army jawans.

December 7, 1990:

A group of Indian Army fastened with rope both Badan Bora and his wife in their cow-shed on December 7, 1990 and entered the house. They raped Badan's 19 year old daughter Anjumani Bora inside. While after sometime she came out shedding tears at the loss of her virginity, another jawan again dragged her into the house and raped her while the other jawans were guarding it from outside in front of the parents.

December 20, 1990:

Malak Saikia's 26 year old wife Subodha Saikia was raped in the day light at 3 p.m. on December 20, 1990 by three Indian Army Jawans taking the advantage of her husband's absence at home.

January 7, 1991:

Four Indian Army Jawans entered the house of Kumud Hazarika, a resident of 2 No. Sabati of Village Adarsa in Lakhimpur district at mid night on January 7, 1991 and forcibly dragged Kumud and his 60 year old mother and compelled them to stand out in extreme cold. The Jawans then raped Kumud's wife Nayantara Hazarika, aged about 25, inside the house. She was at that time a mother of one month old baby. Again two Army Jawans forcibly dragged Kumud Hazarika's married sister Labanya Hazarika back side of the campus and raped her inhumanly on January 9, 1991.

January 23, 1991:

One Army Jawan dragged a girl named Rani Mushahari into the deep wood nearly street and raped and threatened of killing if she discloses the incident. She was going to her sister's house and was victimised on the way.

January 14, 1991:

Three Army Jawans entered the house of Tarani Nath of village Tadana in Sonitpur district on January 14, 1991, the 1st day of Magh Bihu, a winter festival of Assam. The Jawans besieged Tarini and his son in a room of the house and abused his 45 year old wife Ambika Nath in the kitchen.

January 19,1991:

Security personels raped Chalmi Hemram, Maita Saren, Adang Narzary, Chootali Basumatary, Sushila Boro and some other of village Dayalpur, Mainajuli, Balapara, Dipankuli inside the Chariduar Forest Area in Sonitpur district on January 19, 1991.

January 26, 1991:

An Army Jawan came out of his group while on raid. He threatened with his gun and raped Sunu Routia, about 25, in the house campus of a man named Munmuchi Haldar, an inhabitant of village Bodatighat under Bihpuria Police station in Lakhimpur district. The lady was collecting vegetables on January 26, 1991.

September 17, 1991:

A group of Indian Army entered the house of Laban, a Barua, aged 30, a resident of village Phanibari at a distance of Narayanpur in Lakhimpur district on September 17, 1991 and ordered the members of the family to keep silence. The Army personnel took her old mother and two children aside, switched off the light and then forcibly dragged Labanya into a room. She was inhumanly raped there by a high ranking Army officer. He then asked her not to disclose the incident to others by threatening of gunning down. The same Army man came at night and again raped her and threatened not to come outside.

September 19, 1991:

Three Army men entered the house of a widow named Numali baniya aged 32, a resident of village Brahmapur Jalukata in Lakhimpur District and raped her quite inhumanly n from of her small children on September 19, 1991.

October 6, 1991:

A group of 7 Indian Army men dragged forcibly a student of Chayduar College, Raju barua towards the backside of her own house

in village Sutargaon near Gahpur in Sonitpur district on October 6, 1991. She was massively raped them all. Later on she was shot down and thrown into a pond nearby. This inhuman inside occurred on October 6, 1991.

The raping was proved by the witness of the neighbours, Raju's sister and mother and also by the post-mortem report of her dead body.

October 12, 1991:

The army personnel raped Dwijumani Nath, about 20. She is of village Anandapur under Bajali Mouza in Barpeta district on October 12, 1991.

October 16, 1991:

About six army vehicles stopped at the gate of Mukta Dutta, a resident of village No.2 Kowadanga in Naobaisha area in Lakhimpur district on October 16, 1991. The army men came out of the vehicles and gathered the house of Mukuta and then picked up his son Babul Dutta to the vehicles by beating barbarously. Mukuta and his wife Sarada Dutta ran to the gate to that the army personnel taking Babul away. At that very moment three any personnel raped Mukuta's only 14 years old daughter Bhanimai Dutta. While the parents returned they saw the army personnel leaving the house and surprisingly discovered Bhonimais dressless body was on bed inside wet with bloc 1. After a while Bhonimai died. The army men blocked the post-m warm of Bhanimai's dead body for three days. Even they used force upon the doctor who did the postmortem and took his signature in blank paper before the completion of the post-mortem. Later on, the raping was proved only by counting the barbarous marks seen on her left check and other part of the body. It was also proved that she was killed for nullify the crime.

November 30, 1991:

Army personnel entered the Dhunda Nahar village in Tinsukia district suddenly on November 30, 1991. They brought the males of the village to a school and pushed them into the room of school building and kept there. Then they started hellish torture upon the women. They raped Bina Gagoi, Niru Gogoi, Santi Gogoi and forcefully undressed three 16 years old girls Nina, Punya, and Laskhi respectively. The army personnel physically harassed them.

December 17, 1991:

Lahai Sumbrary, a tribal woman, was idling for cold air on the floor infront of their house with her husband at night on December 17, 1991. Suddenly two army personnel came and ordered them to go inside the house. They brutally tortured her husband and pushed him underside the bed in his house. They also made him lye with sharp knife on his throat under the bed on which Lahai was inhumanly raped. The Jawans left the house giving the couple threatening that they would be killed if they disclose the crime committed by the Jawans.

December 13, 1991:

Army personnel raped two tribal women named Achibala Boro and Mububala Boro of village Balisinga near Chengahali in Sonitpur district. Then army personnel arrived at their houses in the name of raid and raped them both.

July 8, 1996:

Army personnel covering their mouths with black cloth arrived at Rusha village on July 8, 1996 and taking the opportunity of absence of electric light while the yuths of Waangsu village and the maidens were sleeping on Dekashang (sleeping house of the youths) and Gavarushang (sleeping house of the maidens) seperately after having supper at night. The army personnel bound up the youths with rope first and then jumped over the girls with evil intention. Three Jawans of Indian army raped 4 month's pregnant woman Chintai Wangchar who died on August 3, 1996. The victims of army's massive rape on that night there were Tegme Wangjo, Pirang Laham, Kajowak Wangjo, Mochat Jamiswan, Peram Loham and Fero Wangjon.

August 19, 1996:

India army jawans entered village Sahpur, Koyakuchi and Jajiabari under Ghograpar police station in Nalbari district at midnight and abused and molested many women. The victims fear to open their mouths for fear of social disgrace and isolation from the society.

September 24, 1996:

Army jawans raped the young daughter Gaonburah (head of the village) of village Naosalia Madhuting near Dhulijan in Tinsukia district. They also raped four women in village Rangapara. Two women of tea-garden's labour community and other eight women are still untraced. Runumi Chetia and Monomati Chetia are under treatment having signs of brutal torture on their body.

October 26, 1996:

Sri Suren Gagoi, a Jawan of No.1 Assam Special Reserve Force (ASRF) stationed near the Rangsai Police outpost in goalpara district raped a 12 years old girl on October 26, 1996.

On the same day, Indian army personnel made sexual outrage upon many women in village Bam Kalakhowa under Larua Mauza in Dibrugarh district in the name of raid. An army Jawan and Wahid Ali, a constable of Kowang police station entered the house of badan Dihingia. They first dragged him out of his house and ordered his wife Kumali Dinghia, aged about 30 and his sister-in-law Nabanita Dihingia to go into their rooms. The constable entered the room of Kumali and pushing the jawan out and raped her. Then the Jawan entered the room and he also raped her in front of her 8 years old child. The constable and the jawan also abused and molested Nabanita and 8 months pregnant woman Jamiti Chetia, a neighbour of Badan Dihingia.

November 2, 1996:

Army personnel raided the house of Suren Gogoi of Hatisungi Maran village and raped his wife Bina Gogoi, a mother of a two and a half years old child during the raid in presence of in-charge of Titabar police station and a cornel of the Indian Army.

February 8, 1997:

Security personnel raped 40 years old widow women Laify Basumatary, Sarumati 13 years old, Phulmati, Nakata Basumatary, Anjali Musahary and another two women at Kathanipur and Joyantiapur the boarder village of Assam and Nagaland.

February 9, 1997:

Army personnel entered the house of Cheniram Dihingia of village Bharalua under Panitala police outpost in Tinsukia district at down. The Jawans and the officer of 79 sikh regiment raped 16 years old daughter Jonmani Sandikai who was a guest at the family on February 9, 1997. The army Jawans first drove away the girls sleeping with her and forcibly dragged her into the drawing room. They kicked brutally on her chest and appetite (??) and made her unconscious to some extent. They raped her. The Jawan offered Rs.70 to her at the time of departure and threatened not to disclose the rape of anyone.

Usha Sonowal:

Usha Sonowal, a young girl of 18 and a resident of Debrapara village under Titabar police station in Jorhat district went to observe the Adyashradha (a religious ceremony to pay respect to a departed soul) of Pankaj baruah on June 16, 1996 last. This was held at a neighbouring village called Puthinadi near Nakachari. She went there with some of her friends.

Usha had failed metric examinations twice but was a lively girl and an active social worker. She was closely involved with the weavers association and also the artists association of her village.

During the ardyashraddha ceremony army men suddenly arrived at the scene and picked up a youth Biul Buragohain without any reason. A large group of those present then rushed to the police station to register their protest. They shouted protest slogans and attempted to stop the army men from taking Bipul away. The Jawans in retaliation stopped their car at a distance, released Bipul and then rushed back at the crowd and began beating up people indiscriminately. The crowd mostly fled except for a small group of young boys and girls who refused to run away. Usha was amongst them. They Jawans turned their ire on them and beat them instead. When Usha protested vehemently one of the Jawans took out his pistol and fired at her. She was hit on the forehead and died instantly. The dead body was handed over to her family the next day.

Golapi Basumatary 22 December, 1996:

Golapi Basumatary was the General Secretary of the Bodo Women Justice Forum; she was brutally shot dead by the culprits on the 22nd December 1996 by 5.20 pm at Katapary village near Borama under Nalbary district. It is worthy mentioned that she was an Assistant Secretary of All Bodo Women Association before appointing her as the General Secretary of the BWJF, but she resigned the former to sincerely render her social service through the latter. Besides she associated herself with the various organisations like Nalbari District Tribal League. Bodo Sahitya Sabha, Student Union and other local social activities. She was declared as a martyr.

Women in armed struggle in Nepal

All Nepal Women's Organization (Revolutionary)

Introduction:

Nepal, a ribbon like country is sandwiched between the two giant Asian countries, China on north and India on East, West and South with a population of 20 million people. It is a multi-ethnic, mullet lingual country ruled by central state imposing Hindu religion as the only religion of the state. It is interesting to note that the state of women varies from one geographical region to another, together with changes in races. Women belonging to Tibeto Burma race and following Buddhism in the North high mountains are relatively freer, more independent as they fall on more primitive tribal society than women belonging to Indo Aryan race following Hinduism and inhabiting in the Terai region of South Nepal. Because of availability of vast stretches of fertile land, this region has more feudal influence resulting into much lower status of women. The middle region comprising of hilly region has a mixture of both Indo Aryan race and Tibeto Burman race, resulting in a situation whereby women's position stands in the middle.

History of women's movement in Nepal

The heroic struggle of Nepalese women side by side with men, to defend against the invasion of British Indian troop has been mentioned in Nala pani war that took place in Dehradun around the year 1816. Fearing the advance of Britishers in the Northern part of India and eventually to Nepal, the king of Gorkha, Prithvinarayan Sha consulted otherwise more than 50 odd principalities into one unified central state. As perceived Britshers did attack Nepal but was badly repulsed back. However in the next battle, Britishers managed to attack Nepal from all sides, it was in Nalapani that the decisive battle took place leading to humiliating Sugali Treaty - 1816. The heroic fight put by Nepalese women together with their children along with their men have been mentioned in the history. Since 1816, Nepal was absorbed into a semi colonial bondage which still exists today with the 'Free' India.

Anti -Rana Period:

It was the ant-Rana movement which gave birth to women's organization for the first time in the history of Nepal. The oligarchic rule of Ranas (1847 - 1951) had been oppressing to almost slave like situation. Externally it was functioning as a stage for the Britishers and internally it was letting loose atrocities on toiling mass by exploiting them to brink. It was in the year 1947 the group of women mostly wives of anti-Rana movement leaders formed Nepal women's organization (Nepal Mahila Sangh) maintaining it as an underground organization. The aim of the organization was to uplift the women's cause and to overthrow the Rana regime. As a result of their atrocities, many of their leaders had been imprisoned and persecuted.

Formation of All Nepal women's Organization: Leftist women's Organization:

It was in 1951 All Nepal Women's Organization branched out of the existing Nepal Women's Organization on ideological basis with the withdrawal of Britishers from India, the position of Ranas in Nepal become more vulnerable. The growing strength of people's movement in Nepal which started as anti- Rana was taking more radical form endangering not only Rana rule but also questioning the Monarch which was trying to gain sympathy from people as its power too was badly untailed under the Rana rule. The foundation of Nepal Communist Party in 1949, its growing population in Nepal together with the liberation of China under the Communist Party of China frightened Neuru who hastily aborted the movement in Nepal by bringing Nepal to sign Delhi Agreement in 1950 whereby a compromise was reached between the old Rana regime, the Monarch and the Congress Party (The Neo stage of India Ruling Class). This accord was against the people's sentiment and the Communist party of Nepal condemned it. When Jawaharlal Nehru was to visit Nepal, the debate arose within the Nepal women's organization, whether he should be welcomed or shown black flag as a symbol of protest. The majority of the central committee of the organization was in favor of flagging black flag to Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru. Eventually a major section of the organization lead demonstrations showing black flags, these women were leftist in ideology. This lead to formation of All Nepalese women's organization which became a sister organization of the communist party of Nepal. However a brief honeymoon for Communist Party and its sister organization was made over when King Mahendra imposed coup over the democratically elected parliament to form its own Partyless Panchayat System which was to last for 30 years (1950 - 1990).

Women's Role in People's Movement of 1990

The anti panchayat movement reached climax when India imposed economic sanction against Nepal leading to overthrow of absolute monarchy system. Women, because of economic hardship and the brutal torture and suppression by Panchayat regime, arose in numbers with sickles in one hand and children in another fought bravely against the police, this lead to about 13 women being martyred in mainly urban areas. Meanwhile the fuel of anti monarchy feeling was spreading in rural areas too. Fearing radicalisation of movement, once again India, ruling class together with imperialist countries intervened to make reconciliation between the monarch and reformist section of the movement from resulting into the formation of parliamentary system under the leadership of the king.

Women's Movement under Parliamentary System

Women participated in great numbers to get rid of absolute monarchy system in the hope that their status would be enhanced under the parliamentary system. However this system gave them just sweet hopes cheating them in every elections. The much anticipated women's equal right over parental property for which they had been struggling from Rana period has not been materialized yet. In the name of freedom, choice, the parliamentary system openly supported beauty contests, allowed pornography and gave protection to brewery plants even when they were objected by vast majority of Nepalese women. While Parliamentary system thoroughly exposed bourgeois parties in regard to solving people's basic problems including women's rights issues, it also exposed the reformist left parties who had been harping New Democratic Revolution against feudalism and imperialism in theory but never daring to bring it to practice. What more, they were increasingly getting engaged in parliamentary politics in the name of using it for revolution, or as a pretext that time was not ripe for the revolution. It was communist party of Nepal (Maoist) in its third central Plenum held in March 1995, which chalked out a detailed politico military polpy and program which out lined the strategy and tactics of people's war in the country and made a final decision to launch the war. This lead to initiation of the armed people's war on the day of February 13, 1996.

What has sent women to class war in Nepal:

Nepal is a semi feudal and semi colonial country. This has direct repercussion in women in Nepal. The Hindu law does not treat her equal as par with men - this directly reflected in inheritance law; women denied their equal share in parental property as daughters. They get it only through husband, that too under the conditions that they should be at least 35 years in age to claim their share of property from their husbands. What makes things more complicating is that while divorce is legal but upon divorce women loose their right over their husband's property. This way they remain property less both from their natal family and from their husband's family, thus they are forced to live as cowives much to their own humiliation. As unmarried daughters, they can claim their due equal share of property until they reach 35 years, however, if they decide to marry after that they have to return all their properties to their brothers, parents. Even when they have to take loans for starting their business they have to get their husband's signature as security for their loan. At one end their quest for freedom is thwarted in the name of protecting them, at the other end they are increasingly exposed to imperialist cultural invasion by reducing them to objects for commercialization. The spurt of Beauty contests at local level is the most visual commercialization of Nepalese women. In hilly terrain in Nepal, water may not be as easily available as liquor. Despite marine protest against liquor industry, the government is giving the a license to operate them.

The pathetic condition of Nepal is reflected by the 11st that 71 per cent of population are living below absolute poverty line with 60% of illiteracy rate. It is the second most poorest country in the world with nearly 90% of the population engaged in backward agriculture. Amidst this low level of social development the extreme high degree of class polarization and inequality is marked by 10% of landlords and rich peasants owing 65% of cultivable land, against 65% of poor peasants owning mere 10% of the land.

Externally the country is becoming more and more dependent on foreign aids, internally it is suffering from stagnant economy (a pathetic 1.25%) of labor force engaged in industry. All these have direct, heavy bearing on tolling mass specially toiling women. With the growth of feminisation of poverty, women have to increasingly take the stress of poverty. Because of survival problem able men of productive

age group migrate to India to work in various low paid unskilled jobs leaving their family behind. Thus women are forced to take incharge of both home and farm management. While young men are forced to sell their youth for mercenary services for foreign countries, young women are forced to sell their bodies in brothels at Bombay, Delhi, Kanpur etc.,. The difficult terrain of mountains region (which constitutes more than 2/3 rd of total area) together with the lack of basic infrastructure has direct bearing as toiling women have to often walk for hours to fetch drinking water. Is in this back ground, that All Nepal Women's organization (Revolutionary), a radical women's organization roused to support the people's war for the fundamental change in due super structure in order to fight for New Democratic Revolution. The NCP (Maoist) gave women an opportunity to strike back violently at the state apparatus which had been suppressing and exploiting women overtly and covertly. Disillusioned with sweet promises made by parliamentary parties the women got attracted to the party's short and direct message that comes from the barrel of the gun " all are illusions except state power. They were prepared to sacrifice their life for the long torturous path of protected war - though difficult to achieve it but sure to achieve it! For women this armed struggle was not only for economic and social upliftment, but it was also a struggle for achieving equality at par with men. Hence they fought with more will power. Being doubly exploited and suppressed at home and at work place they joined hand in hand with men to participate, to help nurture the revolution in various ways.

Women were tired of bearing the humiliation of sending their sons, husbands to fight for other country's war while their own country was being ruined by the exploitature feudal lords, comprader bourgeoisie. Thus Maoist Party offered for themselves, their family members to fight for their own upliftment, to destroy the domestic class enemy. In addition to this, for women participating in people's war offered a chance to assert identity, to gain their confidence, to tell their worth, to take their destiny in their own hand - something which the present exploitative system did not give them. The Maoist party on the other hand unleashed this suppressed energy of women by giving them daring roles in the class war. Right from the inception of people's war women as a rule were encouraged to participate in different sabotage raids on rural development banks, raids on police posts, raids on INGO/NGO offices in rural areas, attack annihilation of police informers and hated class enemies. Besides, direct participation in these actions, women played

important supportive role for guerrilla war. However people had to pay heavy price for this war including women. Within one year of people's war more than 70 sympathises, party members of Maoist party have been killed, amongst them 7 women gave their life under various circumstances, reflecting their different roles in the struggle.

Comrade Ditmaya Yonjon: Comrade Ditmaya Yonjon was a squad member, she got martyred while she was preparing to fuse the bomb in preparation of raid in Police Post. The raid was successful bearing many police wounded, two of them killed, the guerrillas managed to snatch rifles, explosives. However, three comrades got martyred in the process. Dimoya Yonjon is the first woman who died fighting gun in her hand. She became a source of inspiration for both men and women in Nepal.

Binda Chaulagaya: Binda Chaulagaya, a pregnant comrade in advance stage was taken to custody for her role in providing food for guerrillas in jungles. She was tortured in the custody which resulted into premature birth leading to death for both mother and child. Her death has exposed the brutality of Police force and has instilled the feeling of revenge among the people against the state apparatus.

Sunsara Budha: Sunsara Budha along with her two year child was subjected to intense torture in order to reveal out the whereabouts of guerrillas. Not being satisfied by torturing her, the police started torturing her two year child. However, Sunsara Budha stuck to the ground refusing to utter a word, the enraged police then killed her by gunshot leaving behind injured 2 year old child.

Dhana Maya Shreshta: Thirty year old Dhana Maya Shreshta is a mother of a child. She was martyred for her role in giving freedom to two comrades from the hands of police. She was a district member of All Nepal Women's Organization (Revolutionary).

Lali Roka: Lali Roka was a Vice President of ANW (Revolutionary) in district level, a very bold and fearless and a active woman. Her eyed were gorged out in the process of torture, she was thrown into burning pyre while she was alive and shouting.

Binsara Budha: The state machinery did not even spare old woman like Binsara Budha who was 70 years old. Her fault was she was a sympathizer of Maoist Party. They brought her to custody from the farm she was working. She was martyred along with five other comrades.

Conclusion:

Right from the inception of communist Party in Nepal, the question of organizing women as a separate front has been developed. This has resulted in mobilizing women politically right from the beginning. However due to the reformist tendencies that was plaquering different Communist parties in Nepal, women's activities were mostly confined to struggling for equal parental right, to struggle against pornography, beauty contests etc.,. Besides giving lip service to help in New Democratic Revolution, these organizations were actually engaged in many reformist kind of activities permitted by the system. It was CPN (Maoist) which gave them opportunity to strike at the state machinery which had been eluding them with all sorts of promises and cheating them. For the first time women realized the class character of the ruling state, the blatant siding of military and police with the feudal lords, oppressing class against the oppressed class. Newer class character of the state machinery had been fully exposed before ordinary men and women as the people has shown women for the first time realized that so called police, military were instead of protecting its ethnic, women rapes, assaults were themselves killing their own people, raping their own sisters in the name of defending oppressive ruling class. The joint solidarity shown by both men and women in fighting against oppression, including even patriarchal oppression shocked feminists of imperialist countries. In order to break the solidarity between men and women they saved feminist ideas in the name of NGO/INGO, Women's development activities. This way they tried to kill the Proletarian spirit of women's movement in Nepal. As if that was not enough they imported all kinds of class alliance theory such as self help projects, empowerment projects to confuse the class character of poverty. This they did by investing lot of donor's money for integrated development projects. Knowing the designs of imperialist countries CPN (Maoist Party) has rightly attacked NGO/INGO offices like Action Nepal, Lutheran Nepal. The growing number of women activists in people's war and 10% of women martyrs indicates how mistaken they are in trying to derail class character of the struggle, the gender consciousness of women's movement. The protected people's war has given correct message to women that it is the state machinery of oppressive class which is responsible for upholding, giving protection, nurturing the patriarchal value, not men

in general, which is responsible for the perpetuation of women's oppression is just one form of class oppression - hence women should fight class oppression first and continue to fight gender oppression comes from the barrel of the gun on all fronts. Hence for Communist women, proletarian outlook is foremost important before the gender consciousness.

Hence I fully agree with your statement regarding 8th March Women's Day Message!

It is not Ponds W omen's Day!!

It is Proletariat W omen's Day!!

Impact of the new economic policies on women

- Andhra Pradesh Chitanya Mahila Samakhya

Women consist of a half of the society and hence any change in the economic policies will have considerable impact on them. But then women are not a monolithic section. They are divided into different classe ulating a correct practice and thus harms the cause.

This paper by Andhra Pradesh Chaitanya Mahila Samakhya (APCMS) attempts to analyse the impact of the NEP on women with this understanding. Here we mean women of oppressed classes like working class, peasantry and middle class whenever we use the word 'women'. This paper discusses the impact of the NEP on these women.

The New Economic Policies - Context

In 1991 the P V Narasimha Rao government had introduced the New Economic Policies and opened up Indian economy for imperialist plunder. The NEP means formulating our economic policies in the interests of imperialists. Liberalised economic policies, Structural Adjustment and privatisation, which were introduced as a part of the NEP are nothing but the ingredients of the globalisation strategy of the USA. As a result of privatisation, several public sector units have been either closed down or privatised. Consequently, thousands of workers are losing their jobs and joining the army of the unemployed. In the name of the liberalised economic policies the regulations on the foreign investments are being withdrawn. Foreign investments are being accorded with all kinds of facilities to drown the country with them. Thus every effort is being done for the imperialists to exploit our natural resources and human labour at throw away prices. Similarly the process of reduction in the expenditure on welfare schemes, withdrawal of subsidies to agricultural sector, giving away service sectors to imperialists on a platter have started. Due to all these measures, even the nominal opportunities to make both ends meet are being eroded and the number of people below the poverty line is on the rise. Though these changes have essentially been undertaken

since 1991, the roots of these changes lie in the transfer of power of 1947. even though the direct control of the British was done away with in 1947, their indirect plunder continues even today. In fact, after 1947, instead of the investments of one imperialist power, all the imperialist countries have gained a chance to export their capital now. Our own ruling classes consisting of comprador bourgeoisie and feudal classes have formulated our economic policies so as to serve the interests of their own classes and their masters in the imperialist countries instead of making the country self reliant and putting in efforts to create plans to remove poverty, unemployment, illiteracy and ill health. In the initial stages, the government had set up public sector units especially in large scale sector and given away consumer goods sector to the comprador bourgeoisie to exploit millions of people and earn immediate profits. The public sector units helped in fulfilling the interests of capitalists and strengthening the private sector. On the industrial front, instead of developing technical know how and strengthening the industry, our rulers have relied on importing machinery, technology and even nuts and bolts. With this, the industrial sector has stagnated without any development. A lot of foreign exchange has been spent on importing technical knowhow, luxury goods for the rich and arms. Exports never matched with the ever rising imports. More over, all our exports are generally low priced. Due to the imperialists' control over the international market and the low prices of our exports. the foreign exchange we earned has not grown substantially. Because of the imbalance between the imports and exports, the economy suffered a Balance of Payments (BoP) crisis. To solve this crisis the government approached the international financial bodies like IMF and the World Bank for loans. The loans came along with certain conditionalities to serve their own market requirements. However, these conditionalities appear in the form of treatment for the chronic ailments of our economy. The medicine prescribed by the organisations to cure the 'ills' of any backward country is the same. The remedy thus prescribed for the disease includes, i. devaluation, ii. restricting budget deficit by reducing government expenditure, iii. liberalising economic policies, iv. privatisation of public sector enterprises, and v. integrating Indian economy with the world economy. But this medicine kills the patient instead of curing the disease. Mexico is a glaring example of the effects of the treatment. The developments since 1991 demonstrate that our country is on the way to becoming another Mexico.

Imperialism tries to keep the whole world under its control and shifts its own burden of crisis on to the people of the Third World countries. Imperialism is now in a deep crisis world over. The United States which emerged as a super power after the World War II and acted as a world police to control the entire world is now in a deep crisis. Infiltration of products from Japan, Germany, etc competing with its own products in the world market had fall in the domestic production levels have led to the formulation of the globalisation strategy by the US to regain its losing power with the help of other imperialist countries. To implement this strategy, IMF and the World Bank are sanctioning loans and dictating terms. World Trade Organisation (WTO) has taken up the task of implementing these new economic policies in our country and integrating our economy with world economy. The General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs (GATT) reached at in 1947 has given way to WTO after the member countries signed on the Dunkel Draft in 1994. Integration into world market means molding our own market mechanism to serve the interests of imperialists. But it does not mean that we share the international trade along with the USA on equal basis. According to the Dunkel proposals, seeds, chemicals, fertilisers and pharmaceuticals will be removed from the purview of the Indian Patent Act and treated under the Trade Related Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS). along with this, copy rights, trade mark rights, territorial rights on the new found lands, patent rights on industrial designs, rights on circuit layout designs, and rights to control information are also included in the TRIPS. When our own economic policies are being formulated with the diktats of imperialists, the acceptance of the Dunkel Draft will push our country further into a morass. What crops we should grow, what fertilisers we should use and whom to sell the product are to be decided by the multi-national companies (MNCs). Our farmers will not be able to raise a crop as they wish. They will be forced not to use their own grain as seed for the next crop. That leads the farmers into bankruptcy. Starting from the seed everything has to be purchased according to the prices quoted by the MNCs. The farmers have to depend on MNCs for pesticides and fertilisers. Due to the MNC control over the world market the small and marginal farmers in our country are becoming workers or wage labourers or unemployed. Let us analyse how these developments are affecting the women's lives in different sectors.

Production:

Economic independence is an essential ingredient for women's liberation. Participation in social production is one of the preconditions for the liberation of women. But the economic policies followed by our government are not in favour of enhancing the employment opportunities for women. In fact, they are forcing out women from social production. Or else, the women are being confined to the jobs earning meagre incomes thereby preventing them from achieving economic self reliance. It was the women workers who lost their jobs first when the public sector units and the government services were privatised as part of the NEP. A majority of women are concentrated in the unskilled, lower level, and clerical jobs only. The axe fell first on these jobs. In the government jobs, women are mainly concentrated in banks and LIC and other public service sectors like teachers, nurses. health workers, transport, municipality, etc. In most of these jobs recruitment has been stalled. The first casualty of modernisation and computerisation being undertaken for more profits is the unskilled female workforce. On the one hand the employment is being reduced and on the other, work load on the existing staff is being increased. Assigning the work of three persons or more to one person is leading to the increased pressure both physically and mentally on women and their health is getting deteriorated. The condition of nurses in government hospitals is a glaring example of this. Voluntary Retirement Schemes and Golden Hand Shakes aimed at reducing the workforce are being implemented against the aged and the women initially. The women who lost their government jobs seek their livelihood in private and unorganised sectors. But due to the growth of the private sector which keeps profit maximisation as its goal. day. Private employment opportunities are dwindling day organisations exploit the labour through extended A king hours and intensity of labour. Thus, keeping in mind the extra cost for the additional concession and facilities to be provided if they employ women. the private organisations do not like to take more women. The laws regulating public sector units would not apply here resulting in the intensified discrimination in the wage structure. After the NEP, women are able to get jobs only as casual, contract, part time and piece rate workers. Or else, they are being employed in the Export

Processing Zones (EPZs) set up by the MNCs. The main objective behind setting up the EPZs is to exploit cheap human labour in India to earn super profits. What is cheaper than women's labour in our country? That is why in the EPZs women are being recruited mostly but what kind of recruitment is this? They cannot form unions. There would not be minimum wages. There is no security for jobs. Facilities like PF, ESI, maternity leave and creches are things that cannot be mentioned. There is no question of regularisation of jobs. To put it briefly, all the legislations and facilities achieved by workers after great struggles do not mean anything for them. They have to work like bonded labourers in a jail in most abominable and unhygienic environment. The working conditions damage their health so much that they will not be able to work for more than three years. Suffering from a number of ailments they will not be able to join any new job too. Crossing the age of 25 means losing their most productive age! More over, only unmarried girls are allowed to work in the EPZs. This picture does not only apply to EPZs alone. The existing conditions for almost all women workers in the unorganised sector is similar. In additions to this, most often these workers are subjected to sexual harassment also. These jobs cannot make women self reliant. They force them to become more servile. The real face of the additional employment generation for women thanks to the NEP as claimed by the government is this! Even these job opportunities in the EPZs remain as long as the cheap labour is available. If labour power in some other country is more cheaper the MNCs will shift their capital and operations to that country. The MNCs that enter freely into India due to the NEP are destroying the local artisan and handicraft production with the concessions received from the government and their power of monopoly capital. Consequently women are being deprived of their traditional occupations. The trawlers of the MNCs have not only hit the livelihood of fishermen but also the fish selling occupation of women, thanks to the control of MNCs over the market. Millions of women workers, who used to make beedies for paltry wages have lost even that bare livelihood due to the entry of MNCs' mini cigarettes. Coir industry in Kerala also experienced the same plight. Even in the pickles and papads business where women used to produce small quantities to make both ends meet, the big corporate houses have been

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entering. The ruling class propaganda of the national development and industrialisation thus only serves the interests of imperialists and further pushes down the living standards of the masses. The situation in the handloom sector has worsened due to the new textile policy. The whole world was shocked to learn that 73 handloom weavers have starved to death in Andhra Pradesh in 1991. Women in those families not only lost their livelihood but also were forced into a pitiable condition to bear the burden of the family after the death of their husbands. Similar is the case with the families of the farmers who committed suicide with rising debts due to the crisis in the agriculture following the pro imperialist policies of the government. The farmers are the first target of attacks and harassment from money lenders, bank officials and the revenue collecting government authorities. In fact it is in the agricultural sector that most women participate in production. But with the rise of agribusiness under the NEP the area under commercial crops is increasing and the women are losing their traditional farm works. They are then forced to work for lesser wages in the new agriculture. Modernisation of agriculture, mechanisation and purchase of farm lands by MNCs for agribusiness are leading to the shrinking of employment opportunities for women. Women are facing the pressure of family burden with the mismatch between rising prices and stagnant wages. The people who have lost their livelihood because of the NEP are even migrating to the Gulf countries. Especially women are going there as housemaids. In Kuwait alone 30,000 Indian women are working as servants. This kind of migration is growing day by day. Separated from their husbands, children and families, these women are forced to work there in intolerable conditions. Beating and torturing them is not uncommon. sexual harassment is also being reported. Even after coming back society is not integrating them in normal process and they are being humiliated. On the other hand, the wives of the male workers who migrated to the Gulf have to bear the brunt of raising their families. The mental pressure they are undergoing has become such a larger issue that psychiatrists have started calling it "Gulf Syndrome". The children of the migrant workers are developing criminal nature with living separately from their parents. The government is looking at only the foreign exchange that is coming from these workers but does not at all

care to tackle the problems they face in those countries. As a result of all these developments in the productive sectors, the number of men and women in the unsecured contract jobs is on the rise. Unemployment on the whole is rising and wage levels are falling down. Their future appears more and more bleak. Since they are in such a helpless status women are being easily exploited sexually. The imperialist economic policies lead to the growth of economic as well as sexual exploitation. Living Conditions, Education and Health Our government is toeing the line of the conditionalities imposed by the IMF and World Bank in relation to the reduction in the government expenditure on social welfare schemes and subsidies. Though they claim that theirs is a welfare state, the Indian ruling classes have mortgaged people's welfare for the sake of imperialists' interests. Distribution of essential commodities, education, health care and sanitation which used to be available nominally for masses in the past have now been privatised and became inaccessible. The quality of commodities available in the Fair Price Shops has fallen down along with the rise in their prices. Some have commodities have been removed from supply. Thus the food intake of the people has decreased leading to nutritional imbalance. Since the responsibility of feeding the family lies with women, it is customary for them to eat the leftovers in the end. So the food intake of women has further decreased. In these circumstances, girl children are being discriminated against in the case of their food. Because of the malnutrition women are facing a number of problems and even death at the time of delivery. The number of people who migrate to urban centres is growing day by day leading to the rise of the number of slums. But with the cut in the sanitation allocations the already unclean neighbourhoods have worsened resulting in more diseases and infections. Privatised sanitation works take care of only posh localities. As the health care sector is also subjected to reduced fund allocation, these diseases do not get any remedies. The responsibility to cure the common diseases has been abdicated by the government after the structural adjustment. The funds to Malaria eradication programmes have been stopped. With the privatisation of pharmaceutical industry, production of essential drugs will come down as they will not yield much profits and their prices will go up. Private companies produce only profit oriented drugs. Since the production is determined by profits even the harmful drugs will be produced. When the epidemics take place more and more poor people become victims because of these policies. Women suffer from several gynaec problems with the additional risks of child bearing and menstruation. That is why they require more health care but in fact women are receiving least medical care. Family control is an important aspect of the NEP. Imperialists hide the fact that the poverty in the poor countries is rising due to their own economic policies. Instead they indulge in a shameless propaganda that poverty and environmental pollution grow as a result of poor women delivering several children like cats and dogs. Thus they impose the condition to implement family control stringently on the governments of poor countries. As the harmful contraceptive devices developed in those countries were

rejected by the people there, the same devices are being forced on the women of poor countries like ours. The government itself is supplying these dangerous devices through the Primary Health Centres (PHCs) and playing with the lives of women. The PHCs have become simple family control centres bereft of medicines and facilities to handle common diseases of people in general and women in particular. With the negligent attitude in conducting the family planning surgeries, quite a few women are either dying or suffering from deteriorated health. The number of women dying at child birth and still births have been growing even according to the government statistics. With the privatisation of education and cuts in fund allocation, education is going away from common people and becoming the property of the rich. With reducing the number of social welfare hostels, the students belonging to dalit and backward classes are deprived of minimum literacy. With the indifference towards education of women and the discrimination against women, girl children are being deprived of education. Whatever little opportunity is available is being used to educate male children. The number of women in skilled, professional and higher jobs is still very low since even now women do not have education, that too in technical and professional areas. Women in large numbers are in the mechanical works requiring manual labour. Eroding educational opportunities are further restricting women of poor and middle classes to these kinds of works. These developments are a hurdle in achieving economic independence for women. As

an effect of devaluation, prices of day to day essential commodities have gone up. Except in the government statistics, inflation is nowhere on the decline. Real wages are falling down unimaginably. Thus women are forced to spend each paisa very cautiously and save whatever they could. They have only one way to achieve this, that is to increase their own manual labour. But the rise in manual labour will result in more mental pressure. The mental agony of not being able to feed their children, clothe them adequately and sending them to work enhances the pressure on them. With the increased real estate business for the requirements of the MNCs, people who have been living for many years in the slums in urban areas are being forcibly evacuated and rehabilitated in remote areas without any amenities. Weaker section housing schemes and plans like Indira Awas Yojana are confined to papers only. The time and labour women spend on fetching water and other needs in the new localities are phenomenally high. Common people are unable to have sufficient clothing as they can not buy mill cloth introduced by imperialists on the one hand and traditional handloom textiles going out of their reach on the other. Thus the new economic policies worsen people's living conditions day by day thereby negatively affecting the mental and physical health of women.

Social Justice:

Caste system is a specific feature of Indian society. Reservations in education and employment are created to accord social justice to those castes which have suffered injustice for ages. The reservations have been an important means to provide a place for them. But the privatisation that is going on in all the spheres helps continuation of the caste system. With the privatisation of education, dalits will be deprived of education and they will not be able to compete for jobs. As the reservations are not compulsory in the private sector the already haphazard reservations will not be applied. Due to the discrimination against dalits there is every possibility that they will not get employment in private sector. Dalit girls and women suffer from discrimination at two levels and hence they are affected more. The reservations given for women in education and employment will not be implemented. This way the new economic policies strengthen patriarchy and caste system.

Family:

Due to the deepening economic crisis the violence on women within the family is also on the rise. In the circumstances of either unemployment or inadequate salaries, women appear as an easy source of earning money. More over, because of the rising consumerist culture being promoted by imperialism to sell its commodities, the dowry that is brought by women appears as an easy way to buy those products. Thus harassment for dowry, murders and suicides go on increasing. On the whole, imperialism dehumanises human relationships. it turns relations between human beings into monetary transactions. It has become very common that even after killing a woman for dowry, immediately the culprit is preparing himself to marry another woman. Even the society is ready to get a bride for him. People are becoming insensitive to the fact that a full blossoming life was snatched away. The studies reveal that financial problems are leading to quarrels between husband and wife and amongst family members. The number of divorce cases, violence on women within the family and molestations of girls have grown after the structural adjustment. Men are taking shelter in liquor as an escape from the exploitation and oppression caused by the new economic policies. Since patriarchy has accepted and established all rights of men over women and children, the men drink and beat them up. They show all their frustration on women and children. On the other hand, various kind of gambling that entered the country after the NEP are attracting then. If the men lose whatever little money they have under these influences it is again women who have to take up the responsibility.

Culture:

In the imperialists' perspective, women means nothing but a commodity. She is a live machine that produces commodities. She is a commodity that sells their other commodities. She is the consumer to buy those commodities. She is a commodity that is useful for male lust and thereby generates profits for them. In fact, her body is seen as a commodity in their service. Imperialist culture gradually erases the idea of woman as a human being with flesh and blood from the minds of society and even women. Imperialism is using nude and semi nude female bodies to sell its commodities. Fixing certain measurements to

female body it is holding beauty contests and turning women into robots with artificial beauty. Spreading the illusion of becoming beautiful, imperialism is expanding their cosmetic industry and earning profits. The liberalised economic policies have seen the invasion of Hollywood films with excessive sex and violence. The TV channels of MNCs and local companies are competing with each other to show obscenity and violence. The portrayal of sexual orgies, excessive sadistic violence, permissive and perverted sex on the screen is making people across the ages as sadists and sex perverts. Rapes and molestations of women and girls in society and family are increasing. Kidnapping young college and school going girls, black mailing them to rape and shoot blue films and selling them for profits have become common. The sex scandals of Parbhani, Jalgoan and Tirupati are only those that came out. Eve teasing is resulting in murders and suicides. Youth are not hesitating to indulge in acid attacks and brutal killings of the girls if they do not accept their 'love'. The idea that a female body is only for the pleasure of men has been hammered into our minds in every possible way. Therefore whenever a man sees woman, irrespective of the age, relationship and acquaintance, men are only thinking in terms of sex. Even women are falling prey to the concept of beauty and treating themselves as sex symbols. Imperialist economic policies are not only spreading a culture of sex and violence but also selfishness, competing psychology to use any means to cheat others and "come up" in life and to treat profit motive as the highest goal to be achieved. Mutual cooperation, helping others, manual labour, collectivism, selflessness, and humbleness to serve have become the values that should be looked down. All these values have been injected into women for the benefit of family and now they are making her inefficient in the contemporary competitive world. On the other hand, even middle class women are being influenced by speculation, gambling, drinking and adultery. In the circumstances where life is becoming miserable day by day under the new economic policies, the largest employment opportunity the government provides for women is prostitution. In fact, it is one of the solutions imperialism is offering for those Third World governments which are unable to repay their foreign debt. After 1991, imperialist capital is flowing into tourism and hotel industry. Behind these words, the real activity is gambling and prostitution. The inexorable truth behind the government's

claim that the tourism and hotel industry would earn foreign exchange and helps in overcoming the balance of payments crisis is that the means to earn are the bodies of our women and young girls. In some of the Third World countries, the foreign exchange earnings from prostitution exceeds those from other sectors and is the main source to repay foreign debt. The fact that India ranks second in the number of child prostitutes in the world shows that our rulers want to take the country on the same path. The government's fund allocations after the family control go mostly to AIDS preventive propaganda. The government very well knows that AIDS will spread fast due to their own policies and the propaganda helps imperialists in selling their AIDS preventive commodities. Even as the imperialists shift the burden of their crisis on to the Third World countries, class struggles in these countries are intensifying. To contain the development of class struggles imperialists world over are whipping up revivalism and religious fundamentalism. It is not accidental that the Hindu fundamentalism is spreading its tentacles in our country after 1991. That is one of the consequences of the NEP. The Hindu fundamentalists have demolished the Babri Masjid and massacred Muslims. They indulged in large scale molestations of women. The Hindu fascist forces are seriously trying to become stronger by finishing off minorities through the use of violence and force. They are using the unemployed and lumpens who are being generated as a result of the NEP as their cannon fodder. The rising Hindu culture is trying to push won en into the traditional roles. Feudalism and imperialism are in peaceful existence to foster patriarchy. If feudalism prescribes her the duties of wife and mother, imperialism recommends buying of certain commodities to fulfill those duties. If feudalism prescribes woman's sole objective as to satisfy the lust of husband and men, imperialism asks her to use particular cosmetics to do that. It is in the context of our semi feudal and semi colonial system where a strange situation of showing permissive and pervert sexual culture along with the feudal ethics that glorify woman's submissiveness on the same TV screens exists. On the other hand, the Hindu communalists have been mobilising women on a large scale in the programmes like karseva and making them part of unprecedented vandalism. Women are not only becoming victims of the Hindu communalist and imperialist culture, but also they are being turned into the means to spread the culture.

The NEP - Attitude of Different Women's Organisations:

Though the new economic policies have been introduced by the then ruling Congress, all the opposition parties like BJP, Janata Dal, CPI, CPM, Telugu Desam, etc. are in favour of the policies. Moreover the opposition parties are a step ahead in the states where they rule in inviting imperialist investments. The women's organisations affiliated to these parties are also taking the same attitude in serving the interests of imperialists. They are not taking the side of the oppressed people. They are propagating the illusion that there will be an end to women's misery if they get a reservation in Parliament. In practice this reservation will apply only to the women of bourgeois and feudal classes. Thus they are shifting the real tension of people from the essential problems of poverty and unemployment. The demand for reservation in Parliament is nothing but a craving to share the booty of the exploitation from the people. Feminists, funded organisations and non governmental organisations have published heaps of information on the impact of the NEP on women. They explain the impact in such a detailed manner taht the real reasons behind the NEP get submerged in the information. Drowned in the ocean of minute details, if we search solutions we can only find some vague 'strategies' but nothing else. Since the causes are not identified, even the prescription will not be able to cure the disease. Their analysis starts off from ignoring the fact that there are different sections in women and they are not a single category. They look at the world from the conception of women but not from the class perspective. That is why the whole focus is to find out how the women are more affected by the NEP. This leads to the concepts like feminisation of poverty. As a solution one is forced to believe that it is enough if the government applies gender sensitivity while implementing structural adjustment. To put it in other words their perception only tries to distribute poverty between men and women. But that does not formulate practice to remove poverty. This analysis does not tell us that the NEP have been introduced by the nexus between imperialists and our own comprador ruling classes. They pose the challenge before the women's movement as 'NEP has come (how they came is immaterial) and how women should bear them'. But they don't think the challenge is of rooting out the NEP and eradicating poverty. That is why all their solutions talk in terms of how to bear the burden. But not questioning the economy itself. Another aspect in the analysis is that they treat the government as some thing beyond the compradors, big bourgeoisie and imperialists. They don't recognise the powers that be as belonging to comprador bourgeoisie and feudal classes and they serve the interests of imperialists. That is why they advice that the North countries should be made to respect our laws, that the government should try to apportion the impact of structural adjustments on those countries, that all the countries of the South should be united to bargain with the North and that they should try to mould the international market in favour of them. Coming to our own country they request the government with great confidence to tax the bourgeoisie and confiscate black money and try to reduce the negative effect on the poor. That is why they see these changes as accidental developments after 1980s or 1991. They refuse to see the roots for this since 1947. They treat the changes as temporary and explore some temporary reliefs. Since they do not recognise the class nature of the government they concentrate more on lobbying. That means to reduce the effect on the people and to add the human face to these changes, they try to exert pressure on the government and seek a few measures. This was their attitude towards imperialist governments during the meets like Beijing international conference. The NGO conclave held during that time was only lobbying. Another aspect is opposing class struggle in theory and practice. Exploitative classes exploit as a class and women as a class is subjected to exploitation. But as they don't accept this they do not accept the necessity of class struggle for women. They uphold people's struggles against the NEP at the local, individual and sectional levels in unarmed ways. They propagate people's spontaneous struggles against NEP. But since the state crushes these struggles they have to be developed to higher levels and turned into larger struggles to change the system. But they restrict these struggles and think society will be changed through these spontaneous struggles only. The struggles to change the system does not find a place on their agenda. Another demand they put forth is reservations for women in Parliament and Assemblies. The solution for the problems of the NEP is to join the same system which has caused the NEP. Another solution is for voluntary organisations to spend more time in balwadies and preparing the women to bear the burden of NEP through thrift societies and co-operatives. The experience of the last six years amply demonstrates the benefits women gained though the voluntary organisations! How much savings can be mobilised from the rising population below the poverty line is one aspect and the responsibility to face poverty is being shifted on to the people themselves is another aspect. It is not accidental that the number of funded organisations has grown up after the introduction of NEP. The unemployment, hunger and poverty resulting from the NEP will force the people to the revolutionary path. Therefore the governments and imperialists have been encouraging the funded organisations as safety valves. While reducing the social welfare fund allocation on the one hand the government itself is funding these organisations and openly asking them to take up social welfare activities like flood relief, relief for earth quake victims, creating watersheds and managing balwadies. If it is the government, people can question it, because social welfare is its responsibility. But if it is this kind of NGOs, their activity is only out of compassion, and one can not question even if they do or don't do. Even the bourgeois newspapers are reporting that their practice is less and misappropriation is more. People's problems can only be solved through the ownership on means of production and fair remuneration to labour. But these organisations do not take up these real issues and try to turn the people in to beggars waiting for the crumbs they leave. Most of the representatives of the feminism in our country have started their own funded organisations and the dividing line has been blurred. That is why the essence of all their analysis on NEP is similar.

Some feminists do not accept any funding but they look for the roots of all women's problems in patriarchy and reject class struggle. The role of exploitative classes in establishing and strengthening patriarchy and their interests in continuing patriarchy are being ignored in this perspective. Therefore even as they oppose patriarchy they will not be able to make any impact on it.

Resistance and Repression:

People are militantly resisting effects of the NEP wherever they can. Especially peasantry and workers are participating and leading these struggles. Thousands of peasants under the leadership of KRRS in Karnataka are fighting militantly against GATT and WTO. They have attacked the offices of MNC seed company Cargil and destroyed it. Peasantry all over the country expressed protest when the

GATT agreement was signed and fertiliser subsidy was cut. Workers of Victoria, Kanoria and Nellimarla jute mills, cement industry workers in UP and workers in Chattisghar and many parts in the country have been fighting militantly against lockouts, lavoffs and retreschments. Workers of public sector industries like IDPL, Allwyn, BHEL, Railways, RTC etc. have been resisting privatisation. The employees of Telecom, P & T, LIC, banks and electricity board have been gradually joining the struggles. In the private companies the workers struggles for their rights and hike in salaries and other problems are strengthening day by day. The government is constructing big dams like Narmada, Tehri and Sardar Sarovar following the World Bank conditionalities. Adivasis have been heroically fighting against these big projects which degrade environment and displace them. In AP recently the Chandrababu Naidu government tried to withdraw prohibition and welfare measures toeing the World Bank line. A number of mass organisations and women's organisations militantly obstructed that attempt. Women have participated in a big way in the struggle of West Godavari peasantary against the increase in power tariff and water cess. Against the imperialist culture, organisations of writers, cultural activists and women have been fighting separately and collectively. They are attempting to build up an alternative people's culture. These organisations have resisted Miss World contest recently in Bangalore as a part of that programme. In all these struggles women of working class, peasantry and Adivasies have been actively participating and at some places they are even leading the struggles. In the recent Parliamentary elections people expressed their protest against the NEP without giving absolute majority to any single party. This is because all the parliamentary parties have invited the NEP. In several states people have taken up election boycott as a form of struggle against the government's failure to address their demand. In addition to the struggles against the NEP, the struggles to over throw the exploitative system are being intensified in the country. They are taking the form of armed struggles under the leadership of revolutionary parties. Peasantry, workers and Adivasies under the revolutionary leadership have been waging the struggles against the effects of the NEP like privitasation, cutting subsidies, GATT, big projects, nuclear power plants and cable TV culture. The growing scope of these struggles demonstrates people's resentment over the NEP. Women are participating in considerable number in these armed struggles also. The government is trying to crush all these people's struggles against the NEP through brutal repression. The government and capitalists conspired and killed Chattisgarh working class movement leader Sankar Guha Niyogi. Struggling workers at Nellimarla, Dalla and many other places were fired at and killed. The police have shot dead two farmers at Kaldari in West Godavari. Opening fire and killing agitating peasants and workers, arresting them and indulging in lathicharge have become every day practice. The leader of the Narmada Bachao Andolan Medha Patkar was arrested many a time. Adivasies in that area were arrested and forcibly evacuated from that place. Women activists who were demonstrating against Miss World contest in Bangalore were arrested illegally and kept at unknown place. This way innumerable examples can be given to show the repression on the people against the NEP. This repression is much more severe on the revolutionary parties which question the root cause ofthe NEP and fight for the transformation of system. The ruling classes very well know that the real strength to resist and root out the NEP lies with these parties only. Killing the cadre of these parties and people under their leadership and sympathisers in fake encounters is on the rise. It is not surprising that the government which deprived health care for the people with its privatisation killed Dr. Narayana who had treated thousands of people free of cost.

Whatever may be the extent of repression the government is indulging in, people's struggles are marching ahead. The NEP has created a situation where the people will not loose anything by struggle. Repression will only lead further resistance.

Conclusion:

We have attempted to explain the impact of New Economic Policies on women as a class and additional specific burden as women. The impact may be in some other fields which we have not touched upon here. We may come to know of those fields while working amongst the people. However the vital aspect is the objective of our analysis. Why do we undertake this study? Is it to gather information? No. We are studying the NEP only to formulate a clear cut policy to over throw NEP. "What did we do to have so much foreign debt? Did our children eat much? Or our children studying in prestigious universi-

ties? Have our standards of life improved? Have our salaries increased so much? No. No. No. We tell this in unison. We never ate much. We never had good clothing. We never accessed better health facilities. But who cornered all these benefits? And why should we repay that debt?" - These are the questions posed by a Bolivian woman. Now we also have to put the same questions. The answer is all those benefits have been cornered by imperialists, comprador ruling classes and feudal classes. That is why we need not repay that debt. We have to annul that debt. To do that the only means is to secure state power in the hands of oppressed masses. This is the crux of the matter.

Indian ruling classes are imposing the NEP on us under the tutelage of imperialist agencies like the World Bank and IMF. These are not the economic policies that serve the interests of the oppressed masses. They are exactly opposite of that. Any economic policy in our country which does not change the agrarian relations and which does not talk about land to the tiller can not bring about basic change in the system and can not remove the misery of the masses. Ours is basically an agrarian country. Along with this the strangle hold of bourgeois and imperialists over the industrial sector comprador should be overthrown and the factories should be given away to the workers. These goals can be achieved only through taking part in the New Democratic Revolution being waged against comprador, bourgeois and feudal ruling classes which subject the country to imperialist neo colonial plunder in the name of the NEP, and their imperialist masters. This is the only way to remove the impact of the NEP on the women of the oppressed classes. Only those struggles which aim at transformation of system will have the strength to over throw the patriarchy also. Because the root cause of patriarchy lies in the system.

Women too will be able to remove the exploitation and oppression they face as an oppressed class and as women only by taking part in the New Democratic Revolution. Only thus they can have the way to women's liberation.

Tasks of Women's Organisations

1. Extensive propaganda among women has to be undertaken to expose the nexus between the NEP and imperialists as well as how our ruling classes have mortgaged our county. We should also propagate the nature of economic policies which serve the interests of the oppressed people.

- 2. We should organise women of working class, peasantry, Adivasies and middle class against the NEP in the struggles.
- 3. We should form united fronts with trade unions, mass organisation, peasant and wage labourer associations and environmental protection groups and other democratic forces which fight against the NEP.
- 4. we should build a broad based movement joining all the forces against imperialist culture. We should attempt to develop people's culture.
- 5. We should expose the inconsistency in various feminist arguments which do not show the real reasons of the NEP and do not talk of transformation of the system. At the same time we should try to form united fronts with those feminists who are not funded and fight against the NEP to any extent irrespective of mistakes in their understanding.
- 6. We should expose the nexus between the voluntary, non governmental and other funded organisations on one hand and imperialism and the government on the other. We should expose their real aim of the diverting people from the revolutionary path. We should isolate them from people.
- 7. To overcome the negative impacts of NEP the only way is New Democratic Revolution which over throws the system and secures state power for the oppressed masses. We should make oppressed masses and women understand this and turn their struggle against the NEP in to a larger struggle against the system. We should build up a women's movement which aims at New Democratic Revolution.
 - * Let us fight against the NEP!
 - * Long live International Working Women's Day!

* Long live New Democratic Revolution!



Worker's movements are the movements led by workers against the economic exploitating and social repression that target them. With Paris commune, proletarian class accepted the responsibility, in practice, of liberating the whole of humanity from exploitation and of pression. (Its chief companion in an agrarian country like India is the peasantry) Revolutionary movements are the workers movements that are led with this objective. They represent the interests of working class people. They focus on the issues of working class men and women and work with the agenda of attaining state power for them. That is why one finds in the collection both the struggles led by women for improving their working condition and those movements that aim at total transformation of the system.

